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THE DEADLY
HANDS OF
KUNG FU

MAY Nº 24

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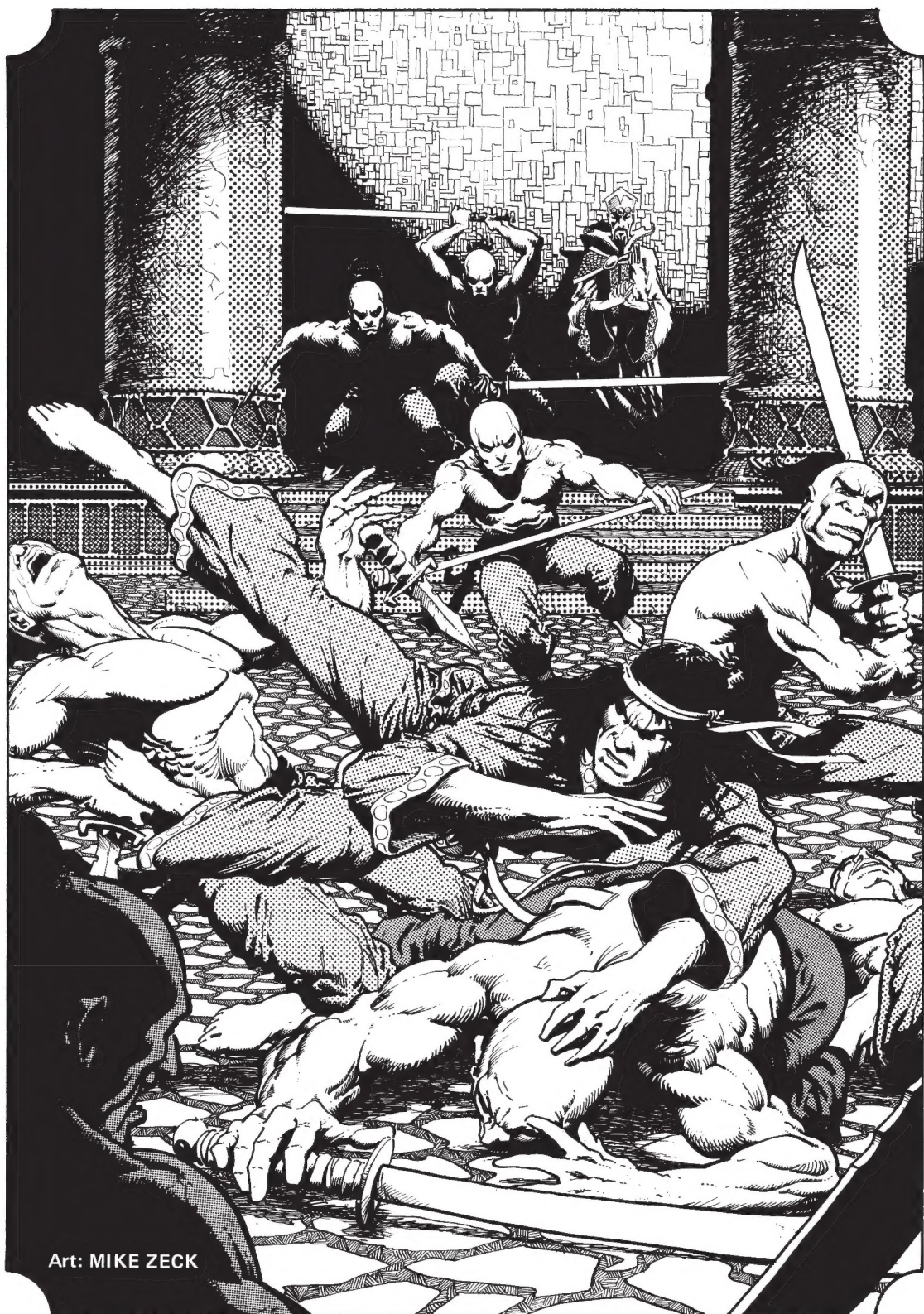
THE DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU™

**ALL NEW!
BATTLE
FOR THE
BIRD OF
FIRE!**

**CATACLYSMIC
CLIMAX!
IRON FIST
FIGHTS FOR
THE FATE OF
THE WORLD!**



MARVEL



STAN LEE presents THE DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU™

Vol. 1 / No. 24

May 1976

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IRON FIST: THE LIVING WEAPON THE ANGRY DRAGON... KILLS!

By Chris Claremont & Rudy Nebres

The senses-shattering conclusion—the
battle for the Bird of Fire and the fate
of the world!

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Beginning— a new monthly column examining current trends in martial arts entertainments. Compiled by David Kraft.	
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SONS OF THE TIGER: “TIGER, TIGER... BURNING BRIGHT—”

By Bill Mantlo, Keith Giffen, & the Tribe

The White Tiger up against the wall, Abe
Brown about to face the sinister snake
pit... plus the maddening mystery of the
Jack of Hearts. This one's got it all!

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It's back-peddling time at Mighty Marvel!

And now that we've got your attention, here's the inside lowdown: Due to two reasons (one of them our fault, one yours) this lettercol is devoted to mail on #'s 19 and 20, rather than #21 as might be expected.

One of the reasons is that the lead time for receiving your letters and assembling them into a column is insufficient. Therefore, by holding off on #21 until next ish, we'll gain enough time to let all your wayward epistles reach our offices.

But the other reason concerns precisely those missives—or, rather, the lack of them. Y'know how we hate to lecture you mavens of the martial arts, but you've become remiss in your sacred duty to let us know what ya did or didn't like. Now, we know this is a time of increasing entropy (if such a paradox can exist), but excuses just don't cut mustard when it comes time to typing this two-page testimonial.

So get with it, people. Send us letters, cards, notes. We just can't bear the thought of selling these pages as additional ads.

Dear Marvel:

DEADLY HANDS #19 was fantastic. At last, Iron Fist in action in a black-and-white magazine! After the six months of his adventures are over, why not switch your format to feature different established Marvel kung fu stars in each issue? Stars like the Mantis, Moondragon, the Living Goddess, Misty Knight and Karnak. Think about it.

And while you're thinking, why not give the Sons of the Tiger their own color comic? They're great as an action team, and it's a shame to see them break up. White Tiger is a powerful and interesting character with great potential; I'm waiting to see how you develop him. Make mine Marvel!

Wilson Rivera
Brooklyn, NY 11206

Wilson, by now you know that Moondragon has co-starred in our monthly color title, MARVEL TEAM-UP #44, in a tale penned by the Tiger Son's own Bill Mantlo. And you never know when one of the high-kickin' stars will turn up either there or in our special solo MARVEL SPOTLIGHT title. However, plans for the immediate and near future are fairly well firmed up for DEADLY HANDS, and do not include any of the characters you suggested. Sorry, But we hope you'll still keep your kung fu habit by reading these pages, cause if there's one thing you can be sure of, it's that we're always certain to throw a few surprises your way whenever you least expect it.

To the Fingers of the Hands—

It would have been easy for you to fill your book with rehashed tributes to the late Bruce Lee and endless photos from forgettable films. But you didn't.

Instead, you give knowledge, like articles on weapons and the techniques by Steve Clement and Val Eads, two writers who know what they're talking about. Also on the same bill, Don McGregor's movie analyses are the best; I hope he'll give THE KILLER ELITE the same treatment he gave the Bond film and THE YAKUZA.

In the comic department, the Sons of the Tiger have stolen some of the fury from the lead attraction, Iron Fist. Due to the fact that Manto/Perez/Abel carefully choreograph their characters' battles, but not so with Rudy Nebres. He lumps all his figures together, thus making it quite difficult to tell what's going on.

With a stable of talent like that mentioned above, should we be surprised that the shepherd of this flock is Archie Goodwin?

Maybe The Kung Fu craze is only resting. Comfortably.

Gus Allaway
Dedham, Mass.

Gus, if we gave out no-prizes here in our black-and-white magazines, Artful Archie would be addressing one to you right now! Compliments are the sustenance of many an editor's egregious ego, including goodhearted Goodwin. Be that as it may, we're not about to relax our recalcitrant efforts to maintain a high level of variety, cause if the kung fu trend is indeed dead, then that means we've gotta work harder than ever to stay successful. And you can bet that's what we plan to do!

Dear Archie:

The cover of DEADLY HANDS #19 was excellent. Larkin did a masterful job.

The first installment of the Iron Fist story was both interesting and well-illustrated, and it's good to see Dan Rand becoming emotionally involved with a member of the opposite sex.

In issue #15 it was said that Marvel had two main categories of readers for DEADLY HANDS—the martial arts enthusiasts and the comics readers. Fortunately, I am both, and so am interest in the articles and the comics. However, I didn't like the articles in #19. I found "Dragon of the Mind" to be boring, as I'm not really interested in reading about obscure kung fu instructors, although some of Ling Chi's opinions were valid and sensible. The karate covered some material I hadn't read before, but I don't really think this is the right magazine for an article on the history of karate. "World's Deadliest Fighting Secrets Not Revealed" was uninteresting. If the Black Dragon Fighting Society members hadn't bothered to master techniques such as punching and kicking, what were they doing battling black belt karate experts?

Please don't place any less emphasis on the comics than you do now, or any more emphasis on technical features, lest you become like *Black Belt* or *Karate Illustrated*. You have a totally unique identity now as



JW-151



DEADLY HANDS.

Keep up the good work.

R. Howard
Melbourne, Victoria Australia

We're glad that, in this instance, the lettercol delay has allowed for us to use your letter, Howard. Generally, mail from foreign countries arrives too late for inclusion in the pertinent letters page, yet many of our overseas observers have—as you put it—"valid and sensible" opinions of offer.

As for keeping our identity, we couldn't lose it if we tried. That's what makes *Mighty Marvel* the mastadon of magazine groups—or something like that, anyway!

Dear Marvel:

Your outline feature on Martial Arts Weapons was very informative. I collect weapons like these because I find them extremely interesting.

I'm also pleased with the comics, although sometimes you go beyond the realm of imagination. I was quite surprised when I picked up DEADLY HANDS #19 and realized the Tiger Sons had broken up. But in retrospect, it seems only natural and human.

One small complaint I have is that when DEADLY HANDS first started, it primarily featured Shang-Chi, who is now seldom seen. Are you going to bring him back?

I'd very much like to see an article on THE DRAGON FLIES, starring Jimmy Wang Yu, which was surprisingly well made. And another on Bruce Lee's uncompleted film, GAME OF DEATH. I think it would make an interesting story.

Tony Reynolds
Pittsburgh, PA 15145

You'll be pleased to hear that Shang-Chi will be back, Tony, in an upcoming team-up with Iron Fist, to be written by Devil-May-Care Doug Moench and drawn by Moody Rudy Nebres. We're not exactly sure what issue that'll be in, though, cause betwixt now and then we'll be featuring a four-part mini-saga titled "Swordquest!" Our very own Joltin' John Warner is the writer, while Sanho Kim and Tony DeZuniga are the artists.

And if you were here last ish, then you read Dave (the Dude) Kraft's rambling review of THE DRAGON FLIES. Always happy to oblige, Tony. As for Lee's

final film, we'll no doubt do something on it in the not-too-distant future.

Dear Bill,

I do hope you have not killed off Abe Brown, mainly because as long as the former Sons of the Tiger are all alive, there's still a chance that they may get back together. I hope so.

The White Tiger is excruciatingly dull—much more so than those three at their most boring.

Ann Nichols
Sierra Vista, AZ 85635

As we pointed out earlier on this selfsame scintillatin' letters page, *anything* can happen at marvelous Marvel, and often does. So don't discount the eventuality of a Sons of the Tiger reunion sometime, somewhere. But heck, Ann, a great many Marvelites betrayed similar early trepidations about the Tiger Sons as you now have about the White Tiger. All we can ask is that you give him a chance. Let Bill do his stuff, and who knows, in another issue or two you may change your mind. Of course, whether you do or not, we'll still be expectin' to hear from you!

Dear DEADLY HANDS:

¡Bienvenido y Felicidad!

I have just read your b&w mag for the very first time, and am most impressed by the artwork. I believe your plots for Iron Fist and the Sons of the Tiger are quite entertaining, too.

I really dug your Tiger Sons story (in #20), and to get into what was happening, I read "Enter the Letters." In regard to those who decry the Tigers in favor of Shang-Chi, I say bunk. They just don't like anything that too bluntly reminds them of reality. Shang-Chi touches reality often, but not in the same way as the Tigers. Therefore, I agree with the guy from Portland, Oregon, that you've set up a reality situation so close to life that you're going to have to start dealing with the complexities. This series is too good to leave loose ends untied.

I just hope you guys keep up the good work of making society aware of its ills. Kids are not the only ones who read comic mags. We need to face reality every day, to keep from copping out. You are a part of society, and can have an affect on it.

Live long and prosper.

Louis Butts
Epworth, IA 52045

Whew! That's some rap you laid on us, Louis, but as we've pointed out in various editorials and answers to letters on these pages, we agree with you and are trying—each in our own way—to do what we can about the greater ills of our daily life, while still providing action, entertainment and

excitement along the way.

Thanks for the kind words!

Marvelmen:

From the very beginning, I've read DEADLY HANDS. It's been uniformly excellent, and I love Iron Fist, Shang-Chi, and the now-departed Son of the Tiger. Keep printing more about them, particularly Iron Fist, though not in six part serials, as often these become entirely too long and complicated to follow.

Issue #20 was very good, indeed. I'm not sure why, but it sent my thoughts hearkening back to an article by David Anthony Kraft in #5 about the K'ing Kung Fu series, featuring a character called the Son of the Flying Tiger. Why don't you star him in a several-ish series?

Enough suggesting. Now for a favor: Do you carry back issues, and could you supply a few copies of DEADLY HANDS that I'm missing?

Roger Jette
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

We get so many requests for back issues, Rog, that it re-boggles even our already thoroughly stunned-and-wog-boggled minds. Unfortunately, our over-worked and casually cramped yet still bombastic Bullpen is so mired in a never-ending battle with the Dreaded Deadline Doom and other continually-proliferating contingencies involved with the creation of our comic stories that there's absolutely no way for us to stock and ship back issues. Would that we could, friend Rog, would that we could.

However, you'll note that from time-to-time ads for particular back copies appear in these pages, and those advertised are indeed available from a special independent service that supplies them to interested Marvelites. But *only* those advertised are available. We're sincerely sorry, cause we'd like to be able to send 'em out to those unfortunate enough to miss a particular issue; yet if we did that, we'd have to stop producing *new* issues, and that would be an even bigger catastrophe!

All right, fightin' folks, we managed to make it through this month's "Enter the Letters" without the real entry of any mail on #21. But we guarantee that we'll be back on schedule next ish, and ever after (though that may be a most rash promise for us to make!). Remember our threat—send in your comments, criticisms and compliments in abundance...or do you *really* wanna see two more ad pages here?

THE DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU
Marvel Magazine Group
575 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022



DRAGONS OF THE DEADLINE

Despite the title, this isn't one of those editorials that explains why the items we promised you in last issue's Next Issue ad isn't in this issue as promised because of the Dread Deadline Doom. It *could* be. Except last issue, because of deadline problems, we didn't have time to do a Next Issue ad. But don't worry. Tempting as it might be for harrassed editorial staffers to continue the practice, we intend to continue the editorials instead. After all, along with our letters pages, editorials are one of the few ways we have of communicating directly (more or less) with those of you who read the books. And that's important to us.

One thing I've been intending to communicate for some time is a little information about some of the hitherto unsung people in our constant battle with the aforementioned Dread Deadline Doom. Writers, artists, and editors come in for their fair share of the credit (or blame) on a pretty regular basis. But if you'll check out the masthead on our contents page,

you'll find several names a good deal less familiar, but no less important to the success of DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU.

Barbara Altman handles the layout and design of the magazine. This covers everything that isn't comics. She selects all the typefaces, artfully arranges and crops all the photos, then combines these elements into dynamic and eye-catching total page designs. Barbara's artistic contributions have been a big factor in raising our articles sections—once the bane of the black and white line—to one of the most well-received parts of the books.

Dan Adkins is not exactly unknown to most readers. His work as penciller and inker in our cavorting color line, as well as occasional contributions in the black & whites (Check out PLANET OF THE APES #21 for his latest), have won him a good many accolades and several awards. But as art consultant on the black and whites, he's always ready with pen and brush to make vital last-minute changes and corrections in any of the

artwork. Everything from adding an overlooked dragon tattoo to IRON FIST's chest to retouching Bruce Lee's head to get the hairstyle right on a painted cover. In between, he's always available to help a harried, technically inarticulate editor explain to an artist *exactly* why a drawing that doesn't seem to be working is going wrong.

Len Grow is our production manager. He has the unenviable task of trying to wheedle all the editorial material out of us in time to meet our printing, engraving, and shipping schedules. In addition, he coordinates all advertising material with the rest of the book, and stands ready to solve all the myriad little technical problems we manage to come up with. Such as how to get a page done entirely in pencil reproduced well (strong black ink is usually required on all drawings to assure that they engrave and print clearly enough to be seen), or supervising an elaborate paste-up job so photos and artwork can be combined to correctly achieve a required effect.

If all the things the three people above are involved in don't sound like enough, bear in mind that they get the material last. Everyone in this crazy (but fun) business works against deadlines, but this titantic trio always face them at the eleventh (or later) hour. Our final line of defense, so to speak, against the Dread Deadline Doom. Writers, artists, and editors have usually stolen as much time as possible to get the material just the way they want it; Barbara, Dan, and Len have to work their magic with whatever's left. And the amazing thing is that, month after month, they actually manage to do it.

There are a number of others whose names aren't on our masthead, who also contribute mightily to turning out a magazine which looks strongly professional, rather than the haphazard, amateurish effort it would be without their contributions. Most are letterers or production people: *Stan Aaron*, *Howard Bender*, *Nora Maclin*, *Karen Mantlo*, *Jim Novak*, *Irv Watanabe*, and *Denise Wohl*. Two others who certainly deserve credit are *Sol Brodsky*, our Vice-President in Charge of Operations, and our Circulation Director, *Ed Shukin*. And naturally, no magazine in the magnificent Marvel empire would thrive for long without the soul and inspiration of the guy who started it all, *Stan (The Man) Lee*.

That pretty much leaves only one other uncredited person absolutely essential to our operation. *You*. We might do it without you, but it sure wouldn't be any fun.

Archie Goodwin, Editor

Left to right: Dan Adkins, Nora Maclin, Len Grow. Seated: Barbara Altman.





IRON FIST

PART
6

WELCOME TO THE
LAST DAY OF THE
WORLD...

"...AT 7:05 AM, IT'S A
LOVELY SPRING MORNING
HERE IN THE **BIG APPLE**--
THE SKY IS CLEAR, THE
AIR CLEAN; TRAFFIC IS
MOVING SMOOTHLY WITH
NO MAJOR TIE-UPS ANY-
WHERE IN THE METRO-
POLITAN AREA...

THE ANGRY
DRAGON...

KILLS!

"...IF YOU ASK **ME**, THIS IS
A DAY FOR PLAYING
HODKEY AND HEADING
FOR THE NEAREST PARK.
ENJOY IT WHILE IT LASTS,
MY FRIENDS, 'CAUSE
REALITY'LL BE SCREW-
ING US ALL UP SOON
ENOUGH..."

MAYBE **SOONER**
THAN YOU THINK,
FRIEND.

FEEL THE **POWER**, IRON
FIST--FEEL THE **INCALCULABLE**
FORCE OF MY SOULGEM AS IT
LASHES OUT AT THIS CITY YOU
PROFESS TO **LOVE**--!

FEEL IT **TWIST**
MANKIND TO MY
SHAPING--

--THE SHAPING OF
DHASHA KHAN!!

AND **KNOW**, WARRIOR,
THAT FOR **ALL** YOUR
VAUNTED SKILL AND
STRENGTH, YOU CAN DO
NOTHING TO STOP ME!

POWER!

RAW, UNSHIELDED, RAMPAGING ACROSS THE DEFENSELESS, UNSUSPECTING CITY LIKE A HERD OF CELESTIAL BUFFALO GONE MAD, THEIR CRAZED, MANIC CHARGE SHATTERING ALL TIME AND SPACE...

POWER!

...(SOMEWHERE IN THE INFINITE, A BLUE-WHITE PRIMARY BULGES AS IF KICKED, PROMINENCES FLARING, ENERGY BUILDING, A YOUNG STAR GOING SUPER-NOVA A TRILLION YEARS TOO SOON, CONSUMING PLANETS CIVILIZATIONS, PEOPLE, NONE OF THEM KNOWING, UNDERSTANDING...WHY)...

POWER!

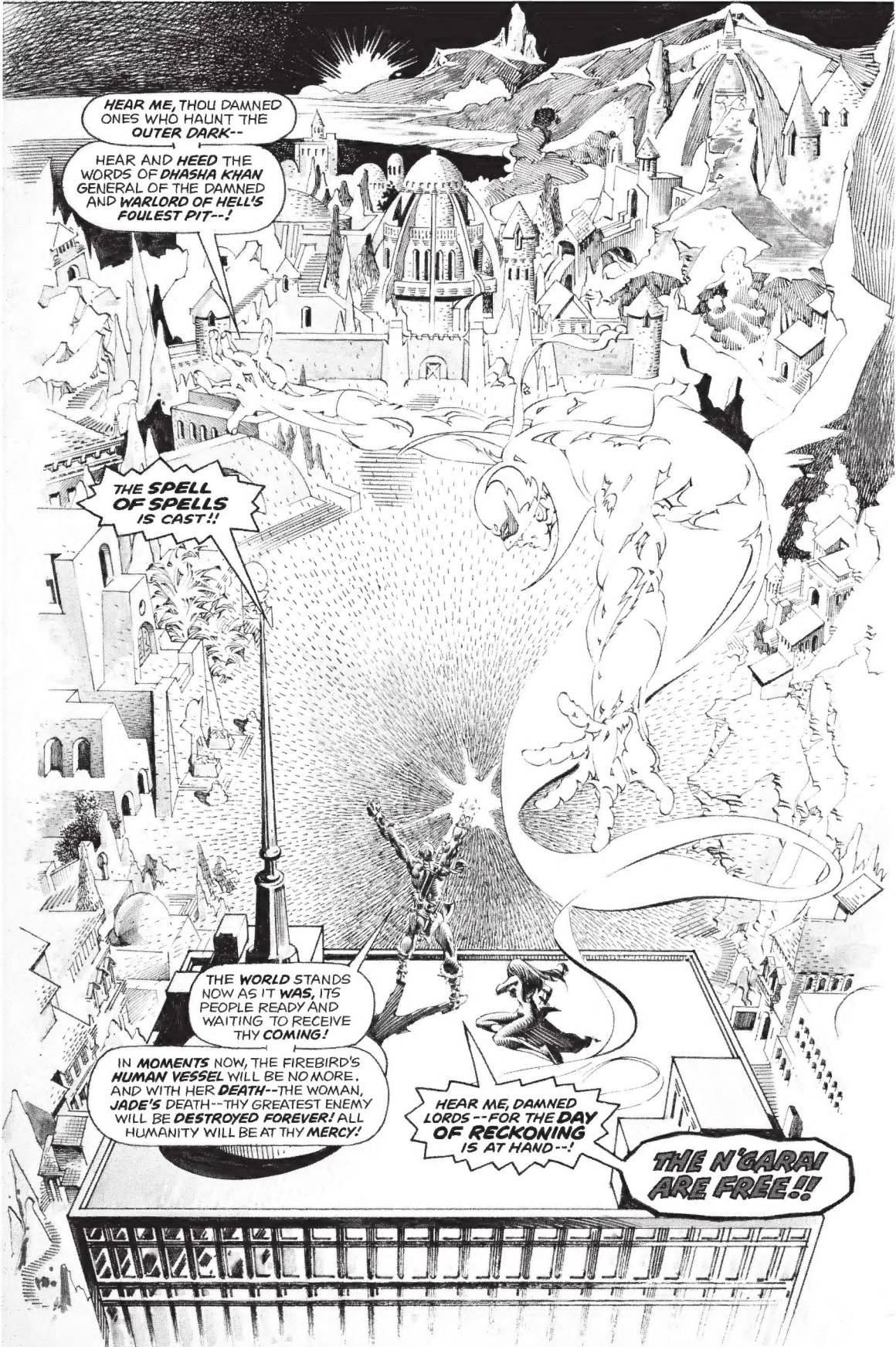
...SOMEWHEN, HERE, NOW!
TIME FOLDS IN UPON ITSELF,
GRINDS SHRIEKING TO A HALT
AND SHIFTS INTO REVERSE,
AGES SLIPPING BY IN SECONDS...

POWER!

...UNTIL NEW YORK
ISN'T NEW YORK ANY-
MORE---AT LEAST
NOT THE NEW YORK
IT WAS A MINUTE
AGO--

--RATHER, IT'S NEW YORK
AS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN
IN THE FURTHEST DEPTHS
OF MANKIND'S PRE-HISTORY
--BEFORE CONAN, BEFORE
KULL...BEFORE THE FIREBIRD.

NEW YORK...IN THE DAYS WHEN
DEMONS RULED THE EARTH. AND
MANKIND WAS THEIR SLAVE.



HEAR ME, THOU DAMNED
ONES WHO HAUNT THE
OUTER DARK--

HEAR AND HEED THE
WORDS OF **DHASHA KHAN**
GENERAL OF THE DAMNED
AND WARLORD OF HELL'S
FOULEST PIT--!

**THE SPELL
OF SPELLS
IS CAST!!**

THE WORLD STANDS
NOW AS IT WAS, ITS
PEOPLE READY AND
WAITING TO RECEIVE
THY COMING!

IN **MOMENTS** NOW, THE **FIREBIRD'S**
HUMAN VESSEL WILL BE NO MORE.
AND WITH HER **DEATH**--THE WOMAN,
JADE'S DEATH--THY GREATEST ENEMY
WILL BE **DESTROYED FOREVER!** ALL
HUMANITY WILL BE AT THY MERCY!

HEAR ME, DAMNED
LORDS --FOR THE DAY
OF RECKONING
IS AT HAND--!

**THE N'GARAI
ARE FREE!!**



IRON FIST,
PLEASE--IN
THE NAME
OF GOD...

...HELP ME
...I AM...
DYING...

HELP ME!



HELP YOU, WOMAN--AND
HOW CAN HE DO THAT
PRAY TELL?

HE IS NOTHING
BUT A GHOST.



YOU HAVE **LOST**, JADE--
NOTHING CAN SAVE
YOU NOW.

NOT YOUR VALIANT
BOWMAN; NOT THIS
OUTWORLD HALF-
BREED WHO DARES
TO CALL HIMSELF
HUMAN.

AS IF BEING
HUMAN WERE
SOME SORT OF
HONOR.



LAUGH
WHILE YOU
CAN, WARLORD
--I'M **NOT**
DONE YET.

YOU'VE TAKEN A
LOT FROM ME THIS
PAST...NIGHT? HOW
LONG **HAS** IT BEEN,
IRON FIST, SINCE YOU
BLITHELY WENT TO
HELL TO RESCUE
THE FIREBIRD...

A NIGHT...OR AN
ETERNITY?



YOU'VE TAKEN--**KILLED**--
PEOPLE I CARE FOR, KHAN,
PEOPLE I...**LOVE**. JADE'S ALL
I HAVE **LEFT** AND YOU WANT
HER **MOST** OF ALL...

WELL, IT'S
NOT THAT
EASY,
MISTER.



RELAX, WARRIOR. **CLEANSE**
YOUR MIND AND SOUL--FOR
IF YOUR **IRON FIST** IS ALL THE
LEGENDS SAY IT IS...

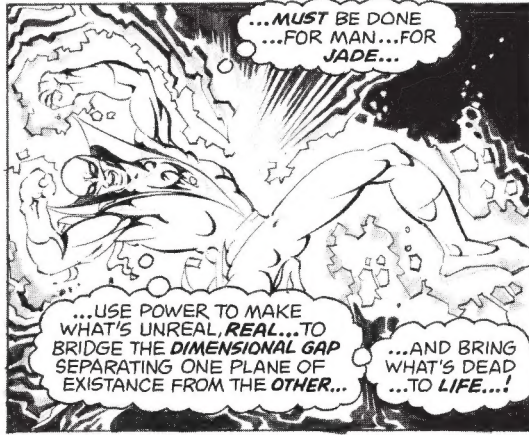
...THEN THIS MAY WELL
BE ITS **ULTIMATE TEST.**



NOW...TAKE **ALL** THE POWER
OF YOUR **CHI**...FOCUS IT...

...BRING ALL
YOUR **STRENGTH**
OF WILL TO
BEAR...

...**IMPOSSIBLE**...
CAN'T BE DONE...
STRAIN...TOO GREAT...



...**MUST** BE DONE
...FOR MAN...FOR
JADE...

...USE POWER TO MAKE
WHAT'S UNREAL, **REAL**...TO
BRIDGE THE **DIMENSIONAL GAP**
SEPARATING ONE PLANE OF
EXISTANCE FROM THE **OTHER**...

...AND BRING
WHAT'S DEAD
...TO **LIFE**...!



DASHA KHAN'S WAR AX CLATTERS BEYOND HIS REACH...BUT A LENGTH OF STEEL PIPE FROM A ROOFTOP AIR CONDUIT IS CLOSE TO HAND... AND EASILY WRENCHED FREE!

I AM THE GREATEST WARRIOR OF MY AGE, STRIPLING--OF ANY AGE--

--IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN WORDS TO DEFEAT ME!

I KNOW NOT HOW YOU MANAGED TO TRANSPORT YOUR SPIRIT ACROSS THE DIMENSIONS NOR HOW YOU GAVE IT LIFE AND VITALITY ONCE MORE...

...BUT IF YOU ARE ALL THAT EAGER TO DIE A SECOND TIME...

...I SHALL BE MORE THAN GLAD TO OBLIGE YOU!

BY ALL THE BLACK GODS--

--I MISSED!

KRANG!

SILENCE, NOW...

...BROKEN ONLY BY THE THIN SKIRL OF A MORNING BREEZE A QUARTER-MILE ABOVE THE SPELL-CURSED STREETS OF MANHATTAN ISLAND...

SSSSZZIPPI!

...AND THE HOARSE GRUNTS OF TWO MEN LOCKED IN MORTAL COMBAT...EACH STRIKING WITHOUT PITY...

WITHOUT MERCY.

GOT YOU!

BROD!

HUUU--!

WROCK!



AND
AGAIN!

WHERE IS YOUR
BRAVADO NOW, SON
OF K'UN LUN? WHAT
PRICE YOUR FOOL'S
COURAGE?

A PRICE I'M
PREPARED TO PAY,
KHAN...

...SO LONG AS
I STOP YOU.

AH, BUT WILL YOU
STOP ME--IF YOU
CAN STOP ME, THAT
IS--IN TIME?

AS BOWMAN MUST
HAVE TOLD YOU,
WITLING, I NEED ONLY
DELAY YOU UNTIL THE
FIREBIRD IS NO MORE.
THEN, NO POWER IN
THE UNIVERSE CAN
REVERSE MY SPELL.

HOWEVER,
IRON FIST, I
WILL FIGHT
YOU...

...AND, BEFORE
I AM DONE, I WILL
TEAR THE LIVING
HEART FROM YOUR
BODY AND OFFER
IT AS A SACRIFICE
TO MY N'GARAI
MASTERS.

OR STOP THE
N'GARAI RESUR-
RECTION!



BUT ENOUGH TALK,
WARRIOR--MY GODS
GROW IMPATIENT FOR
THEIR FEAST--
THEREFORE...

...LET THE
BATTLE
BEGIN!

WEAPON...



...NO THREAT IN THE HANDS OF A NOVICE...
BUT DHASHA KHAN IS FAR FROM THAT.

HIS AXE IS LIKE AN
EXTENSION OF HIS
OWN BODY, A PART
OF HIM...

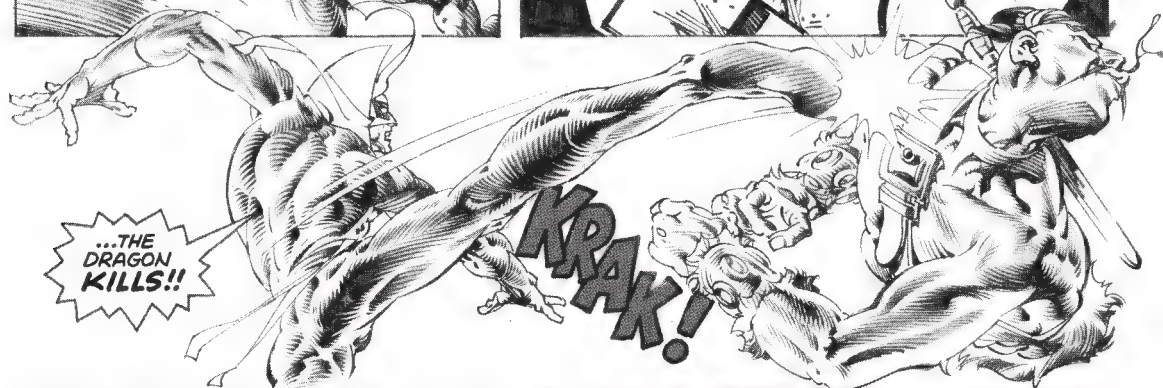
...AND, WORSE, YOU ARE
FIGHTING ON UNFAMILIAR
GROUND...

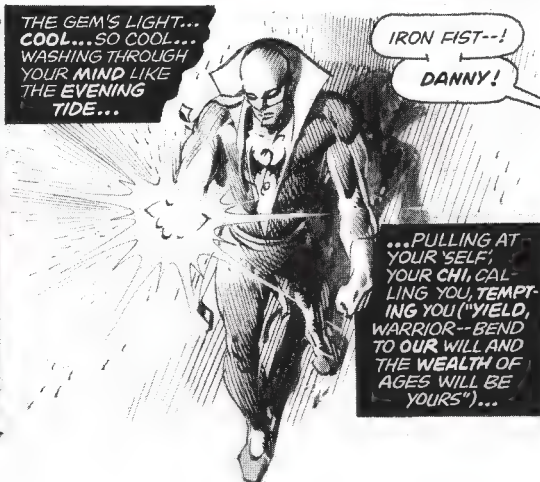
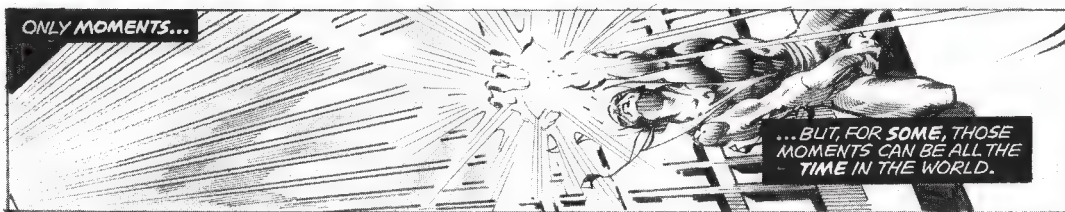
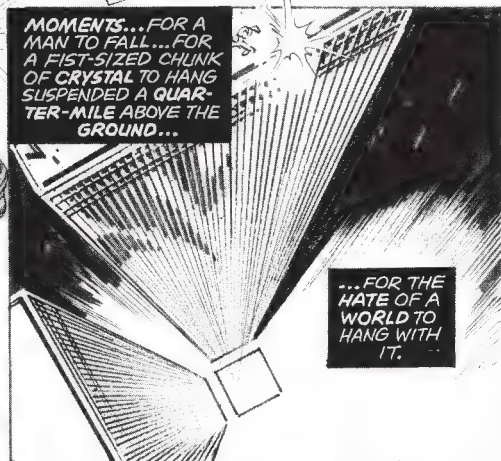
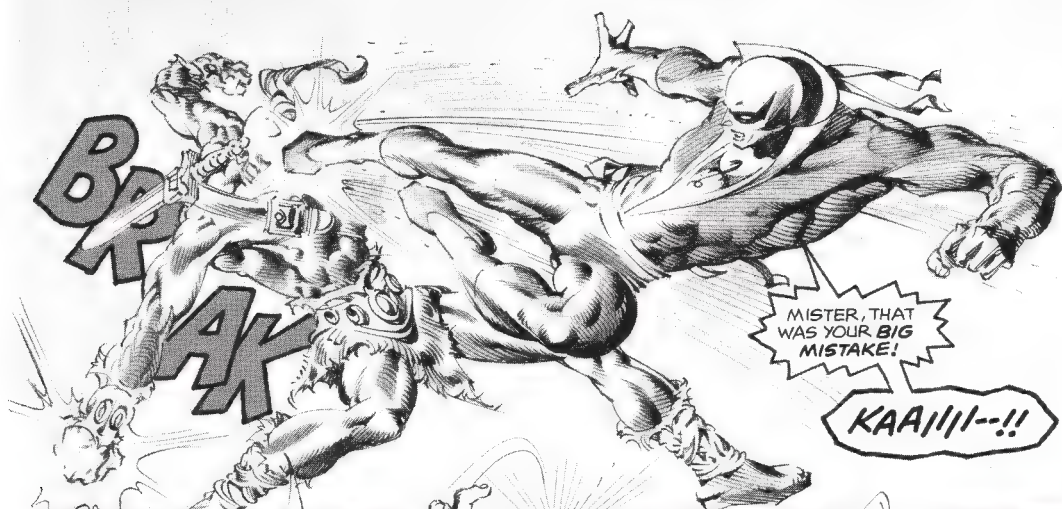
YOU ARE LUCKY. ONCE.
THE NEXT TIME KHAN
WILL HAVE YOUR HEAD.

...IN A DUEL WHICH ALLOWS
NO ROOM FOR MISTAKES,
OR MISSTEPS...











(*"ALL WE ASK IN PAYMENT..."*)

DANNY, CAN YOU...**HEAR ME**--? THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME.

DANNY--!

(*"...IS YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL."*)



DANNY, WHAT'S **WRONG**--? YOUR **EYES**--!

I'M ALL RIGHT, JADE. WHAT IS YOU WANT?

WHAT DO I--?! **DHASHA KHAN'S CRYSTAL**, OF COURSE. I MUST HAVE MY **SOUL** BACK.

IT'S ALMOST TOO LATE AS IT IS.

NO.



HELL AND DAMNATION-- THAT ACCURSED GEM HAS HIM IN **THRALL**!

I'M **SORRY**, LAD--BUT I'VE NO TIME TO BE **GENTLE**, AND ONE OF MY ARROWS CAN JUST AS EASILY SLAY A **SPIRIT** AS A MAN.



FWIP
YOU KILLED ME **ONCE** FROM BEHIND, **BOWMAN**--

--DON'T **DELUDE** YOURSELF INTO THINKING YOU CAN DO SO **AGAIN**!



YOU'RE BOUND TO THE **GEM** NOW, TO THE **N'GARAI**!

I ONLY WISH I **WERE**--IT WOULD MAKE THINGS SO MUCH **SIMPLER**.

STAY OUT OF THIS, **BOWMAN**. WHAT HAPPENS HERE IS BETWEEN **ME** AND **JADE**.



THERE'S **NOTHING** BETWEEN US, NOT IF YOU'RE A CREATURE OF THE **N'GARAI**.

I'M MY OWN MAN, **JADE**. THE **GEM** TRIED TO GRAB ME, BUT IT **FAILED**. WHAT I DO NOW, I DO FOR **MYSELF**.

DON'T YOU **UNDERSTAND**? IT'S NOT THE **DEMON LORDS** WHO **CLAIM** YOUR **SOUL**.

IT'S **ME**.





A SPIRIT-THING, THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL THAT HUMANKIND WAS MEANT TO BE. TRUTH. BEAUTY. GRACE. HOPE. TENDERNESS. CARING. LOVE. ALL THAT IS BEST IN US. ALL THAT IS NOBLE.

BUT YOU'LL GIVE ME UP ALL THE SAME--FOR DUTY.

I'LL NEVER FORGET YOU, DANIEL RAND.

NO. FOR... LOVE.

A HIGHER LOVE THAN THE ONE WE SHARED. BUT NO LESS DEMANDING.

HER LIPS ARE WARM ON YOURS, HER BODY FIRM IN YOUR ARMS--AND THEN SHE IS GONE, AND YOU ARE HOLDING AIR.

TWO SUNS IN THE MORNING SKY NOW--ONE OF NATURAL FIRE, THE RAGING HYDROGEN-HELIUM FURNACE OF THE SOLAR PHOENIX. AND ONE OF...

...SOMETHING ELSE.

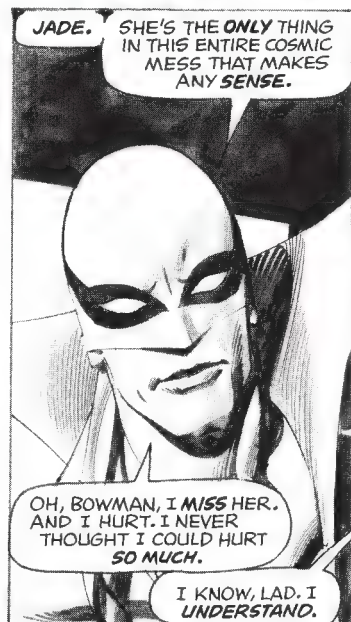
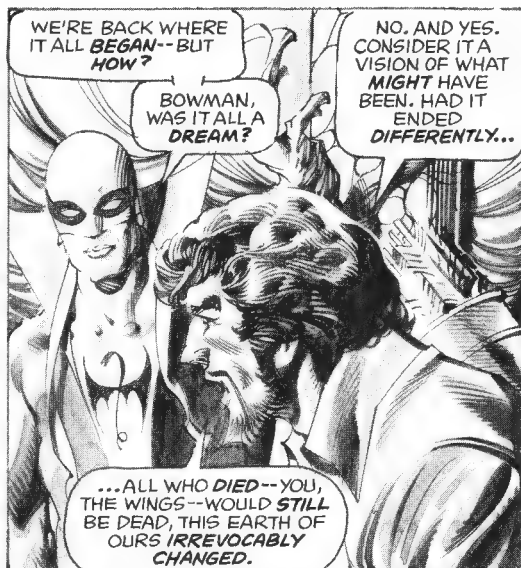


WE KNOW HER AS THE FIREBIRD...

...YOU KNEW HER AS JADE.

SHE WAS RIGHT--THE HURT IS THERE, A HOLLOWNESS DEEP WITHIN YOU, AN ACHING SENSE OF LOSS THAT YOU HAVE FELT TOO OFTEN THIS PAST...NIGHT...THE GRIEF IS UNBEARABLE...

BUT YOU ARE IRON FIST. AND YOU WILL SURVIVE.





"I SERVED A KING--THE BEST KNIGHT FOR THE BEST OF KINGS--WHO HAD A DREAM: TO UNITE ALL MANKIND UNDER THE BANNER OF RIGHT, INSTEAD OF MIGHT. I LOVED THAT KING WITH ALL MY HEART, AND WANTED NOTHING MORE THAN TO SERVE HIM AND HIS DREAM ALL THE REST OF MY DAYS..."

"AND THEN, I MET HIS WIFE. I FELL IN LOVE WITH HER, IRON FIST, AND SHE WITH ME."

"AND TOGETHER, WE MANAGED--WITHOUT MEANING TO--TO DESTROY BOTH OUR KING, AND HIS DREAM."

"BUT EVEN AT THE END, HE LOVED US BOTH. AFTER ALL WE'D DONE TO HIM, HE LOVED US. IRONY? MADNESS? MORE LIKELY, I'LL NEVER KNOW. SO MUCH LOVE...AND IT CAUSED SUCH PAIN..."

OH YES, SON OF THE DRAGON, I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL.

FOR ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A DREAM NAMED CAMELOT, A KING NAMED ARTHUR, A QUEEN NAMED GUINEVERE. AND A MAN WHO DESTROYED THEM ALL, AND HIMSELF AS WELL...

I AM THAT MAN. I AM... LANCELOT. WHO DOES PENANCE FOR HIS SIN BY GUARDING THE FIREBIRD'S SOUL.

BUT ENOUGH TALK. MORNING'S COMING AND I MUST BE OFF.

WHERE WILL YOU GO?

THIS IS A BIG, WIDE, WONDERFUL WORLD, MY LAD. I'LL ROAM IT FOR A TIME, UNTIL THE FIREBIRD SUMMONS ME AGAIN. AND THEN I'LL WALK THE GLORY ROAD.

A PARTING WORD, IRON FIST: IN ALL THE COUNTLESS AEONS, THE FIREBIRD HAS GIVEN HERSELF IN LOVE TO ONLY ONE MAN: YOU.

THERE'S HONOR ENOUGH IN THAT FOR ANYONE, I THINK.

GOD WALK WITH YOU, LAD.

AND WITH YOU, BOWMAN.

FAREWELL...



The first frenzy of commercialized kung fu is over, and maybe that's for the best. In the wake of the flood, the stench of indiscriminate exploitation has become difficult to conceal. Instant masters, overnight dopos, shipshod mail courses in the martial arts, and cheapjack entertainment rip-offs are finding it harder to survive.

In this uncertain climate of dwindling quantity and—perhaps—increasing quality, there's still easily enough action always in the works to warrant a regular feature here in DEADLY HANDS. Ergo, this column. I've volunteered to survey all horizons and, once a month, to deliver my observations in an informal update

FIGHTING ARTS REVIEW

Compiled by David Anthony Kraft

on every facet of the martial arts movement—from movies to paperbacks to live events.

As for the usual thorough approach you've come to expect from DEADLY HANDS, rest assured that we'll still continue to examine individual projects, personalities and media matter in considerable depth, whenever such coverage is warranted. But, simultaneously, you can keep abreast of what's happening from month to month by scanning this space for news and previews.

Since last issue, for instance, evidence has accumulated that the strategy of including the word

"dragon" in a film title is no longer a guarantee of box office receipts. In fact, it may have just the opposite effect on a disillusioned and now wary public. Even *THE DRAGON FLIES* (which I reviewed last month in these pages) has not done well in its first U.S. release, despite favorable publicity from prestigious *Playboy* magazine, and it may be re-released under the title *THE MAN FROM HONG KONG*.

Yet the motion picture industry continues to make use of the martial arts, and currently in release is *THE BLACK DRAGON'S REVENGE*, starring *Ron Van Clief* and *Charles Bonet*, a sequel which is outgrossing the original in ticket sales (and which features poster art by *Neal Adams*, who

has painted more than a few of our own covers). *REVENGE* is due to be followed by still another, though the key word "dragon" has been dutifully dropped from the title. *THE SUPER WEAPON* will have a PG rating, as opposed to the R rating for the former, but promises to be a superior effort with the potential of attracting a larger cross section of the general public than any other martial arts film, according to producer *Seraphim Karalexis*. A semi-documentary, it again stars *Van Clief* and *Bonet*, and is directed, along with *Jim Sotos*, by veteran comics artist *Henry Scarpelli*.

And then there's *TAKE A HARD RIDE*, nominally a western which has received little or no attention, but which numbers among its stars *Jim Brown*, *Lee Van Clief*, and—of interest to kung fu karate fans—*Jim Kelly*. He portrays a non-speaking character, *Kashtok*, who was adopted by an Indian tribe and taught to fight with his hand and feet. The movie is presently in general release, but you may have to actively search for it, since westerns seem to get short shrift on distribution circuits these days.

CALL HIM MR. SHATTER is a peculiar production from Hammer Films, starring *Stuart Whitman* and Chinese superstar *Ti Lung*, made entirely on location in Hong Kong and

even guest-starring *Peter Cushing*. It's the story of an international "contract" killer who becomes involved in political intrigue and survives. Hammer has apparently decided to follow trends, instead of creating them as they once did by revitalizing the horror film field. *CALL HIM MR. SHATTER* is an Avco Embassy Release.

Meanwhile, *Bob Wall*—costar of *ENTER THE DRAGON* and *RETURN OF THE DRAGON*—has put together a first-of-its-kind book, *WHO'S WHO IN THE MARTIAL ARTS*. The volume is an oversized quality paperback, complete with photographs, addresses and descriptions of the premiere personages in karate, kung fu, judo and jujitsu. It also includes a *Directory of Black Belts*. For further information, write to: R.A. Wall Investments, Inc., 9465 Wilshire Blvd. S. 525; Beverly Hills, CA 90212. Primarily a mail order item, you're not likely to find the *WHO'S WHO* in the bookstores.

Dell has followed up their legendary *LEGEND OF BRUCE LEE* paperback with a new release, *BRUCE LEE LIVES?* by Max Caulfield, priced at \$1.50. Whereas the former publication was a creditable effort, the latter appears to be yet another attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the late *Lee*. We'll be rendering a more definitive analysis of the volume in an upcoming issue of *DEADLY HANDS*. This is only an early warning.

Berkeley Books has shown some good judgement by releasing a \$1.50 paperback edition of W.D. Norwood's 1973 novel, *THE JUDOKA*. It comes highly recommended from marvelous Mike Barr, whose guest mini-review follows: "The book is divided into five sections: *Fighting, Hunting, Making, Knowing* and *Loving*. The title character, The Judoka, is a tranquil, pacific young man—a beachcomber who hunts for his food, sleeps when he wishes, lives a seemingly carefree existence, yet always pulls his own weight and takes nothing he does not earn. The author's basic premise, as expressed through the vehicle of his lead character, is that judo is not just a method of combat. He explains that, in judo, one must love his enemy.

"Does this sound confusing? Paradoxical? Good. You are into one of the principal tenets of judo—paradox as a way of life. Paradox—a statement that seems contradictory or absurd, but is in fact true—manifests



An action scene from Avco-Embassy's *CALL HIM MR. SHATTER*.

itself on nearly every page of *THE JUDOKA*. Norwood elaborates, until we learn to regard judo as a Poetic Way—an attitude that can be lived every day, whether in combat or not.

"Those who think of judo only as a way of combat will be surprised by *THE JUDOKA*, for it shows that everything can be lived according to the way of judo; that is, everything can be Poetic. The book contains not only theory of combat, but of massage, net-weaving, Zen, mosquitos, even a method to stop smoking.

"As *The Judoka* says, 'Everything I do is judo—or, at least, I intend it to be.'"

Finally, on the personal scene, *Bong Soo Han* has announced the opening of a new studio for the study of hapkido. The 7th Degree Black Belt who staged and performed the fight sequences in the *BILLY JACK* films is undoubtedly the most renowned practitioner of the art of hapkido outside Korea, and he has spent thirty years developing and refining its techniques. Master Han is the author of many articles on the subject, as well as a book titled *HAPKIDO*. Anyone interested in enrolling in his classes should contact: The Korean Hapkido Association; 2802 Santa Monica Blvd.; Santa Monica, CA 90404.

Before closing this first monthly foray into the field of martial arts activities, I hereby extend an open invitation to all producers, publishers, promoters and others associated with kung fu and related disciplines—whether in media or in actuality—to keep us abreast of your upcoming endeavors. That also goes for any readers who may have something of import to report. Just write me, in care, of the address on the letters page.



Jim Kelly as *Kashtok* from *TAKE A HARD RIDE*, from 20th Century Fox.



Ron Van Clief in *THE BLACK DRAGON'S REVENGE*.

"I looked at the militia-man in front of the car. 'If he makes me get out of the car,' I thought, 'I'll disable him and make a break for the woods!' I was not being brave... I knew I would never get out of prison alive!"

Perez
and
Austin



Illustrations by George Perez and Terry Austin

A look at the men and events that would eventually become the basis for the Jason Striker/Kaii series.

by
Roberto Fuentes
and
Piers Anthony

(Authors' note: this article is a selection of true anecdotes from the biography of a Cuban terrorist, Roberto, as adapted by his literary collaborator, Piers.)

My father was arrested on July 26, 1960—ironically the seventh anniversary of Fidel Castro's own abortive first uprising and arrest. So the "26th of July Movement" applied about as well to me as to Fidel, for it started us both on our careers of anti-government terrorism. Only my

waiters at the Spanish Club at the beach had seen my father give some of the leaflets to a friend, and they called the G-2, or secret police. The G-2 found some of this incriminating material at his house when they took him in. For such a heinous offense, the indictment demanded thirty years in prison. Considering his age, this was much the same as a death sentence.

Of course the police were after me too, as I was my father's son, and active in the same movement. They assumed I would be guilty of the same offense. They were wrong: I was guilty of much worse. Before they came, I got my gun, gathered all the incriminating papers I could find, and gave the bagful of literature to the mother of a friend of mine for safekeeping. "Don't look inside!" I warned her. But she did look—and almost had a heart attack, poor woman. Worse than pornography, that addictive literature of freedom!

champion of Cuba. It would have been a gross abuse of my skill—but I was young then, 25, and peril to a member of my family set me off. I'm older now, but I haven't changed. Fortunately the informers always hid in the kitchen when I showed up, except once when I saw one serving another customer. I went to him and said: "You know who my father is," and I turned away. He turned white as a sheet.

I sent them a message, gentle enough considering the way I was feeling: "If my father is condemned, you are dead." I am not a very subtle person. To make it sink in, I had a friend burn their lockers with phosphorous. Phosphorous is nasty stuff; it burns so ferociously that nothing will put it out, and it starts suddenly like a Fourth of July sparkler. Very pretty, throwing living sparks in every direction, with white glaring light tinged with green from impurities. It makes clouds of acrid gray smoke, stinking of sulphur. It didn't

Three Misses

opposition was to Fidel's government, which I felt was worse than the one he overthrew in the name of the People.

My father was no terrorist. He was sixty-five years old, a retired lawyer. All he did was pass out leaflets protesting the repression of the Catholic Church in Cuba. Young Communist toughs had attacked the crowd of women and old men leaving the *Jesus de Miramar* church after mass.

It was not that we thought the Batista government that preceded Castro was good; it was notoriously corrupt. But Fidel made so many fine promises—and reneged on most of them as he brought Communism to Cuba. What had become of free speech, the free press? Abolition of the death penalty? Open elections? Restoration of the Constitution? Freedom of religion? Our literature set the record straight.

But in a totalitarian state, anti-government propaganda is a serious offense, particularly if it is true. Two

Of course another time I did worse than that: I left a shoe box containing live hand grenades with a girlfriend. She didn't sleep a wink all night, but she kept them safe!

So I went into hiding, but all my friends knew where I was. I stayed at another girlfriend's house, of course. Terrorism does have its little rewards.

When I learned the identity of the two informers who had gotten my father arrested, my hot Latin blood boiled up. I headed for the Spanish Club with my gun, determined to shoot them immediately. But friends intercepted me and persuaded me to wait until my father's trial. Wise counsel; I might have made it much worse for my father.

All right. I waited. But that didn't mean I was letting it rest. I went to the club several times, and such was my temper I probably would have gone after them with my hands if I had seen them. I was then a *nidan* in judo, a second degree black belt,

melt down their lockers, but it destroyed their street clothes and everything else in there.

They got the message. At the trial they recanted and testified that they had not actually seen my father do anything, and that he was a good man. Of course he was a good man—but not in quite the way they meant. So the case against him collapsed, and he went free.

But of course the authorities caught on to my part in the matter. In fact, a stenographer of the court (a friend of our family) later reported to me that a prominent member of the five man court had said "Let the old man go—it is the son we want." So? I want *him*, too!

I disagree with Fidel Castro's politics, but I can say this about his ability: he organized one hell of an efficient police state. Because there were powerful opposing forces, like the Catholic Church, dissidents were not taken in as boldly as in Nazi Germany. A person would be sum-

moned for questioning—and not return. No noise, no violence, no shooting—nothing anyone could really point to. Nothing to justify a protest or uprising.

So when, a week after my father's trial, my friend Pepito told me I had to go to a meeting, I was suspicious. "No thanks," I said. "That's the classic setup for an arrest. An informer sets up a meeting and the police ambush it."

"No problem," he assured me. "This is a small group that always gets together to play dominoes. They know each other. You have to go, because you are SAC's military coordinator."

SAC in this case did not stand for the American Strategic Air Command, but for *Salvar a Cuba*, "Save Cuba," a clandestine resistance movement, small but effective for its size. We were planning an attack on a naval base near Havana. We would raid the ten-man garrison and take their weapons to the Escambia mountains, where we would set up as guerrillas.

Pepito was right: I had to brief this group. It was risky—but counter-revolution is a risky profession.

"We'll go fast, and get out fast," I said.

We went. I was nervous, and I looked all around as we entered the house. There were a half a dozen people playing dominoes and drinking beer—an innocent enough setting, but I wasn't reassured. In fiction, the hero may be supremely confident—but a real-life terrorist is understandably jittery. He has no series-contract with a publisher to keep him alive indefinitely. I thought I heard noises outside. For a moment I was ready to bolt for it, diving out the window and running. But it was probably just my nerves.

Then a man entered. He carried a Springfield rifle and ten militia uniforms we planned to use on our mission. I thought he was our contact—but he was a government man, who had found this incriminating evidence. "The house is surrounded," he announced. "Please come with me, quietly."

We were unarmed and outnumbered. Any attempt to fight would have gotten us shot. The G-2 always brought overwhelming strength to bear in arrests. Why hadn't I thought to bring my gun? I had stupidly walked into the trap, and there was nothing I could do. And so



"There were half a dozen people playing dominoes and drinking beer—an innocent enough setting, but I wasn't reassured. Then a man entered. I thought he was our contact—but he was a government man."

I was arrested—in the classic manner.

I still hoped we could bluff it out. After all, we hadn't *done* anything much they could prove, and the main arsenal of six or eight Belgian-made FAL rifles, several revolvers, two sawed-off shotguns, and some cartridges prepared with heavy buckshot and cyanide for assassination attempts—all this was safely hidden in another place. Oh, we might be given token sentences—but nothing serious. I hoped. Provided nobody cracked under questioning.

But when we got to the G-2 offices, the first thing we saw was a long table loaded with weapons. My friend Tony blanched. "My God—they found our cache!"

I was put in the "cold room" where the air conditioning was turned up so high I thought I would freeze to death. Maybe that doesn't sound like much of a torture, compared to thumbscrews or red hot irons or electric shocks, but believe me, a week of such cold makes confession seem very attractive. A man can withstand pain for a short period, but the long, slow subtle debilitation of simple cold can wipe out his will to resist. I was dressed in only a light short-sleeved sport shirt

and summer slacks, since Havana ranged from 70° at night to 85° in the day.

I didn't crack. It wasn't that I was tough, it was that nothing they were doing to me as a suspect would approach what they would do to me as a confirmed criminal.

After that I was taken to the Cabanas, the fortress-prison. It wasn't like an American penal institution, where cells are restricted to two or four inmates each. There were fifteen long "Galeras" or corridors hewn in the stone of the walls, like railroad tunnels, dank and cold at night. Each contained about 90 men in triple-decker bunks when I arrived, but later there were more. We had to turn in our original clothes for prison uniforms with the letter P on the backs. At the door new arrivals were greeted with the shout "*Carne Fresca!*" meaning "fresh meat!"—hardly reassuring!

The prison was a community in itself, with all sorts of ups and downs and personal interactions. Much of the life was brutal; some had its humorous aspects. One thing you have to realize about political prisoners: they do not consider themselves to be criminals, but men of conscience. They are the high officials

who happened to back the wrong side, the reformers whose good works were not appreciated by the State; the innocents who were drawn in by random arrests or mistaken information. Or so they say. The truth is that some *are* criminals—but many more are *not*. Some of the very best resources of a nation are in the political prison. A lot of political opportunists, too—counting on a change of government to provide high office for them on the strength of their imprisonment. It is a unique atmosphere, completely different from the conventional penal institution.

When I was there, roughly one third were ex-Batista soldiers, another third were ex-Castro men, and the rest were civilians: lawyers,

ings and riots, with virtual warfare between the Batista men and the Revolutionists, who carried their loyalties right into prison. And always the awful pall of the approaching trials. We knew many of us would die at the wall, *Paredon*—but always hoped selfishly that it would be someone *else*.

Actually, my experience was not unique. In Latin America, political prison is often a stepping stone for political power. Perhaps half the leaders are graduates of it. Fidel Castro himself served two years in Batista's prisons, and Batista's predecessor in power had also been in prison. (Batista had the wit to skip the country fast when his regime toppled, or he would have been in prison too.)

My watch was stolen. My two friends, Eduardo Bringas and Juan Pla, let it be known that if my watch was not back in one hour, they were going to take action. Such was their reputation, even in prison, that my watch reappeared within the deadline. These friends have since been immortalized in the name of the hero of the Fuentes/Anthony science fiction novel *Dead Morn*, as yet unpublished: Juan Bringas. Yes, there is an extensive prison scene in that novel, reflecting my experience.

Another friend, Ricardo Cruz, started beating up an informer. There are informers inside prison as well as outside, and they can make a lot of trouble. Once we made a tunnel through the wall of the prison from the infirmary. We were almost through when an informer spilled the news. So tempers can flare when an informer is discovered.

When I got to that fight, the soldiers were just coming to break it up. I got in the way, not exactly accidentally, and saved Ricardo from getting struck by a rifle butt, and it ended with Ricardo and me both getting arrested. Technically we were already prisoners, already under arrest—but as I said, this was like a community, and we were left pretty much to our own device if we stayed out of trouble.

We were taken to Teniente Manolo, the chief of the prison. He hated us, because he thought students were supposed to be more in favor of the Castro Revolution than the average citizen. Those of us who opposed Castro were thus doubly traiters, in his eyes. He was so furious I thought he was going to strike me across the

"When I got to that fight, the soldiers were just coming to break it up. I saved Ricardo from getting struck with a rifle butt and it ended with us both getting arrested."

"When we got to G-2 offices, the first thing we saw was a long table loaded with weapons. My friend Tony went white. 'My God, they've found our cache!'"



engineers, students, doctors, artists, Cuba's leading astrologer, the heavyweight boxing champion of the country, (not to mention judo, ahem), University professors, jewelers, chess players—in short an elite society.

We tried to entertain ourselves with chess, checkers, dominoes, poker, parchisi, Monopoly and exercise in the yard. Judo, of course, was forbidden. But the notion of continuing this for twenty years or so was appalling.

Yet even the short haul was no picnic! There were fights and beat-



face. I'm no hero, but my temper was ragged, and if he had touched me I would probably have thrown him against the wall and tried to beat him to death. You can do a lot of damage to a man in a very short time, if you know how, and I happen to know how. But that would have been the end of me, of course. Such heroics are much safer in fiction!

Manolo must have heeded my expression and thought the better of it. Instead he sent us to the *Capillas*. These were dark, cold, barren stone tunnels under the castle, a kind of solitary confinement cell-complex. Prison was bad, but the *Capillas* were worse! I would certainly be more careful in the future; I didn't want to be sent there again.

Back in the main prison a week later, I found the mood changed, tense, ugly. The prison authorities feared that mood, so they started having sudden trials. Five people would be summoned at a time, and only one would return. "They gave me thirty years!" that one cried joyfully. "Thirty years! Thank God!" That was not a strange reaction—for the other four had gone to the execution wall.

We were all sweating now. They could shoot us if they wanted, just to clear out the cells. Justice in Cuba was at such a state that all they needed were the bullets. In three short hours thirty men were condemned to death, including many of my friends. All but one of those were commuted to thirty years, however. Excellent psychological strategy: the black mood lightened, and there was no riot.

But the single one who was shot was my friend Ricardo Cruz, my companion of the *Capillas*.

When my own trial came, I was convinced I would get at least three to nine years, while a part of me hoped for a lighter sentence, and another part carried the awful vision of *Paredon*, the Wall. Oh God, not that! Yet Ricardo had gone. . .

My trial was around three in the afternoon, but the results were not announced right away, and at six we were returned to our cells. We did not know how soon it would be; maybe in a couple hours, maybe in a week. There was no point worrying about it, though of course we did worry. I went to sleep early, around eight—and at nine-thirty they gave the results over the speaker system.

The names of three of my friends



"We were planning an attack on a naval base near Havana. We would raid the ten-man garrison and take their weapons to the Escambia mountains, where we would set up as guerrillas."

were called out for release. Lucky bastards! Then someone woke me up: "Roberto, get dressed. You are free!"

But I knew about that cruel joke. Wake someone, tell him his name was called for release. A dream come true! His hopes rise sky high, he runs to the gate—and then he learns the truth, and everyone laughs. Ha ha! Very funny. Maybe next day he goes to the Wall. So I didn't believe this news.

But the chief of the galley in our cell told me it was true, and he wished me luck. And so I went home, a free man.

Death had missed me, once.

*

Some people might have given up terrorism after that experience, but I



"In fiction, the hero may be supremely confident—but a real life terrorist is understandably jittery. He has no series-contract with a publisher to keep him alive indefinitely."

had been through too much. The blood of my friends was on the hands of the *Fidelistas*. I was more determined than ever to overthrow the Castro regime in Cuba. The day after I got home, I went into hiding and started contacting my former associates. We were involved in terrorism: that is, bombings and shooting, trying to disrupt and weaken the government. We tried to assassinate some high officers, including Fidel himself more than once—but it is impossible to cover this whole year of terrorism in one short article, so I will give just a couple of examples of the problems we had, and how narrowly I averted disaster.

There was to be a patriotic dance in a small town near Havana, *Guira de Melenas*. If there was one thing I was not, it was patriotic. Not for the Castro regime! So I welcomed the chance to break this up.

A local boy knew the key electric post: the one that, if destroyed, would blacken the entire town. Beautiful! Just let them try to hold the dance, without any electric power. No light, no radio, no music—nothing that depended on the current. Maybe it wouldn't do much to topple Castro, but what a satisfaction to mess it up!

Maybe James Bond type terrorists deal exclusively with world-shaking missions, but I was merely a garden variety terrorist. Later, though, I played somewhat bigger roles in the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Missile Crisis of 1962. I also took part in commando raids. But at this time, darkening a village dance was my level of expertise. We all have to start somewhere, you know.

The boy did not have the nerve to plant the bomb himself, and there was no one else with the critical

(Continued on page 36)

Three Misses

(Continued from page 32)

knowledge, so it fell to me. We went in a car painted like a taxi, with Jorge, another friend of mine, driving. Friends are a great comfort to a terrorist! We got to the entrance of the town—and saw about ten militiamen with rifles stopping the incoming traffic.

"God, they are searching the cars!" I exclaimed. There I was, in the front seat, with the bomb in my lap like a picnic basket. I consisted of five pounds of C-3 plastic explosive wrapped in newspaper. Five pounds may not sound like much, but it was equivalent to ten sticks of commercial dynamite: enough to destroy a house, let alone our carful.

I was eating *Pan de Caracas*, a dry cornbread, and my mouth got so parched the stuff stuck in my throat. The Chinese used to have a test of guilt: if a handful of rice held in the mouth remained dry, the suspect was guilty. I would have failed that test, for sure!

I clutched my gun under my shirt. I looked out at the militiaman in front of the car. I will never forget his mustached face or the FAL rifle he carried. *If he asks me what I have in the newspaper, or makes me get out of the car, I thought, I'll disable him and make a break for the woods!* I was not being brave; I was terrified—but I knew I would never get out of prison alive a second time, because *all* of those caught with explosives were sent to *Paredon*. My temperament was such that I preferred to die fighting; I did not have the guts to stand before the firing squad bravely defiant to the end.

But Jorge, thank God, had a face of iron. "*Companero*," he said to the militiaman, "want me to open the trunk?"

The man nodded. "Yes, please." This was routine, for him.

Jorge opened the trunk—and of course it was empty.

"All right—go on," the militiaman said. We were through!

We continued on into town. We found the pole with the transformers, wrapped the bomb around it (you can shape plastic explosive; it is very versatile, the terrorist's best friend), tightened it with a belt, and touched

a match to the three minute fuse.

And the fuse would not light.

Of all the—! We tried again—and again. Once it started to burn, but it was only the outer casing, not the powder trail, and nothing happened. I had to go back, cut off the end, and try with a much shorter piece. I swear it took five excruciating minutes to ignite that thing, with us sweating more all the time. Any chance discovery by the militia—

Finally it caught. We piled into the car and took off. I know we made it out of town in just three minutes, because as we left we heard the explosion behind us and saw the lights go out. Success!

Later I learned that one man, Tomas, who had helped us had been caught and sentenced to 30 years. I had been tried *in absentia* and sentenced to death. That didn't bother me much; the sentence was meaningless so long as they didn't catch me. But how well I remember that mustached militiaman who stopped our car: my second miss with death.

*

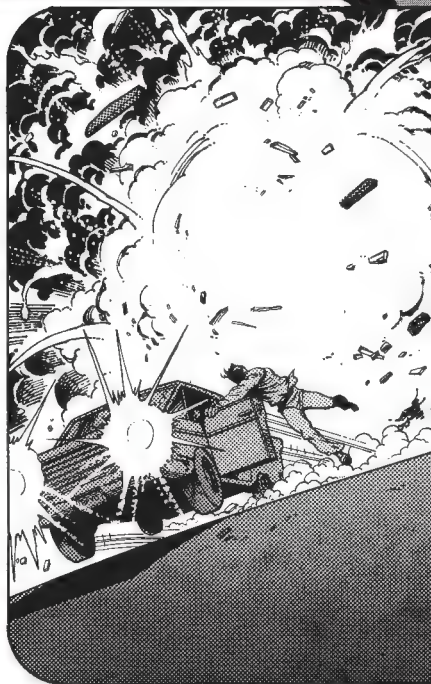
Berty Andino, the MRR Action and Sabotage chief, called me one day: he had 20 pounds of C-3 explosive already made into bombs, and he wanted to test a new kind of detonator. Would I do it?

"Sure," I said. I like bombs. Watching a real blast is almost like a religious experience. "But can I keep the bombs until tomorrow? My brother is Christening his second son this afternoon, and I'm to be the Godfather."

He paused. "No, it can't wait. I'll get another person." I knew he thought I was going to die soon—after all, I had been condemned to death, and my luck couldn't hold out indefinitely—and he wanted me to have this one moment. This nice little family ceremony might well be my last.

Maybe Berty would not have been so nice about it if he had known my other reason for begging off: I had lined up three fine ladies for a party with two friends that night. Terrorism has a strong effect on the personality, because of the constant threat of death. Some turn religious; others develop an inordinate craving for sex. Guess which type I was!

So I did not go on the bombing mission. Instead I attended my



"We piled into the car and took off. I know we made it out of town in just three minutes, because as we left we heard the explosion behind us."

nephew's Christening, and my private party. My friend Enrique went to pick up our third man, Barreto, and for one whole glorious hour I was alone with all three women. What a party!

Suddenly we heard a tremendous explosion, that shook the buildings in a wide area. That would be Berty's bomb crew, doing the job; for a moment I was sorry I was not in on it.

Next day I learned: the new detonators had been faulty. The two men had put the stuff in a car and driven toward their mission—and the plastic had gone off prematurely. Twenty pounds of C-3! Pieces of men and car were scattered across a hundred meters, so mangled that nothing could be identified.

But for the Christening and my "party", that would have been Enrique and me. My third miss with an appointment for death, because I was too busy with three other misses....!



IRON FIST



ART BY
RUDY D. NEBRES

AG-206

THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER



IS STRICTLY AMATEUR!

By Don McGregor

Martial Arts used defensively.
The hero must be provoked.
Constantly!

Danger must threaten not only the

hero's welfare but every innocent
within a 20 mile radius of the hero.

Tom Laughlin, in his three films,
BILLY JACK, THE TRIAL OF

BILLY JACK, and last, **THE
MASTER GUNFIGHTER** has used
this element in every film. In **THE
MASTER GUNFIGHTER**, it is an

audience manipulation ploy he uses about every other five minutes; and the targets are always women who are surrounded by dastardly males with leering grins, with saliva threatening to spill from their lips.

That's Mr. Laughlin's entrance cue.

It worked effectively in the original **BILLY JACK**, when, in his laconic terms, the hero protested the usage of his Martial Arts capabilities before slaughtering half the town. And, no doubt about it, the men he used it against certainly deserved their comeuppance.

In **TRIAL OF BILLY JACK**, the ploy worked less successfully.

In **THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER**, stripped of a contemporary setting against which it might fall when the films flaws begin to reveal themselves, the reluctant killer coming to the defense of the helpless female becomes downright boring. Especially since the motivations of the girl's attackers are nearly always the same one-dimensional lust-degenerates who taunt the girl so that Mr. Laughlin can draw his samurai sword and cut them down.

Under protest, of course.

The blade cannot be bloodied until the hero patiently, and partonizingly, begs them to leave. The one-dimensional lust-degenerates always sneer and threaten to drip saliva and then the blood-bath can begin.

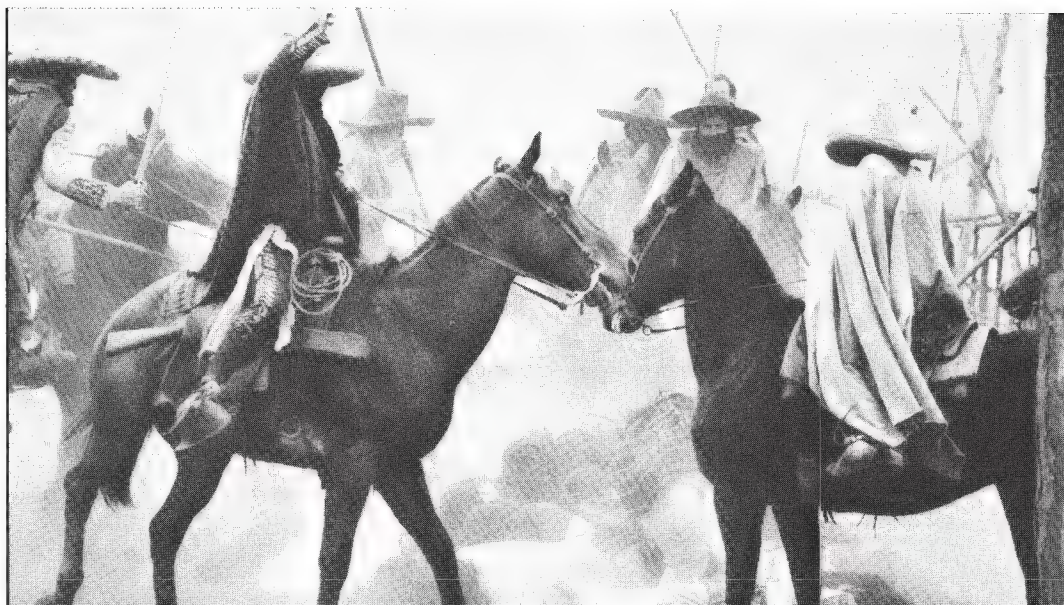
Although there isn't much blood evident in **THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER**.

The bodies merely fall.

And there isn't much masterful sword-play, either.

Quick shots suffice; falling bodies crashing to the earth, a flash of a sword blade here, a flash there. The classic sword-fighting duels performed by Errol Flynn in the early **Zorro** films, or even Gene Kelly thrusting and parrying and leaping and diving and rolling against numerous adversaries in an earlier film version of **THE THREE MUSKETEERS** never appear in **THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER**. One has the feeling that the choreographer for these sword fighting scenes in **MASTER GUNFIGHTER** had to work around the fact that no one really had the ability to use the samurai sword with any credibility.

It might also be interesting to note, before dealing with the film proper, that Mr. Laughlin's constant screen portrayals of protecting women from bodily harm, and also as a champion for the underdog, has taken quite a beating



For gold to preserve the Santiago hacienda, Spanish vaqueros brutally massacre the indians of Goleta, a small fishing village.



Jacques St. Charles (Lincoln Kilpatrick) finds one of his customers a bit testy.

when compared with his real-life situation.

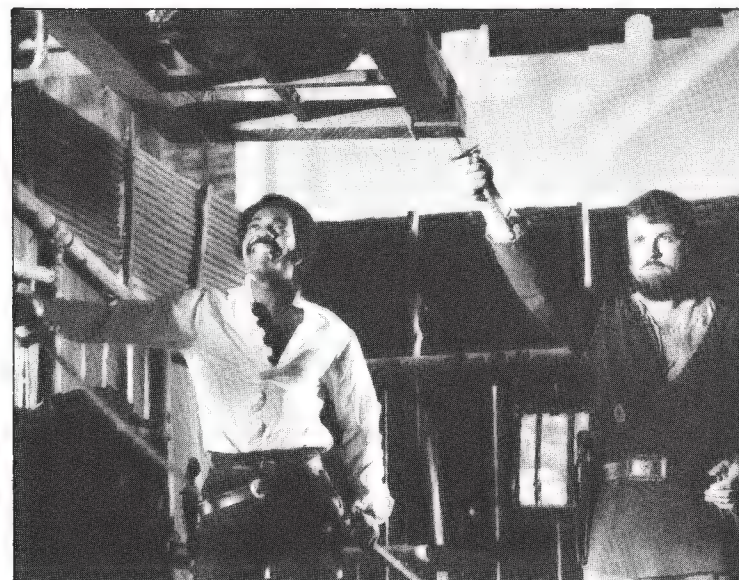
There is no doubt that Mr. Laughlin is a shrewd business-man, his ad campaigns, marketing procedures, etc. give credence to that. But what exactly is Mr. Laughlin selling? Sincerity? If he is, he's doing it at a high premium, and he answers his critics with tactics that are supposed to garner the average man to his side.

Hell, after reading the reviews of Jay Cocks, Vincent Canby, and Rex Reed, who appear to be out of touch with any audience, and mayhaps reality as well,

I'd like to be on Mr. Laughlin's side. Laughlin posted his own image, in the role of Finley, the hero of **MASTER GUNFIGHTER**, over the Times Square area; and, nearby, computerized electronics spilled their message over 7th Avenue, telling everybody everything they never wanted to know about critics. One might have thought this was going to be a personal expose of the tactics employed by different reviewers, but such was not the case, and it is unfortunate that the critical analysis of some of our leading movie and theater critics had to come

which is one check-mark for the viewer's side. Without the cardboard contemporary adversaries such as amoral politicians, corrupt law enforcers, and big business bloodsuckers, the **MASTER GUNFIGHTER** does not have the emotional enemies that immediately puts the audience on the film maker's side. It doesn't matter that Laughlin, in the Billy Jack films, stereotypes these personages into clay targets, they are the villains of our day. We have faced their onslaught outside the theater and found ourselves helpless against a bureaucratic system that has become increasingly complex and apparently more concerned about sustaining and perpetuating itself than performing the public services they were erected to serve.

Of course, Finley has his samurai sword, whereas Billy Jack only has his



Jacques and Finley (Tom Laughlin), thrown together by unlikely circumstances, prepare to defend themselves from the vaqueros that surround the small dwelling.

under the auspices of such an embarrassingly amateur production as **MASTER GUNFIGHTER**. The effects of such reviews, and even the alienation that separates men who watch movies daily, for profit, from the audience who go once a week or once a month, and pay, could stand some examination and not the merely grandstand promotional display that Laughlin erected.

The promotion was as much a fiasco as the movie it was helping to promote.

THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER was nowhere nearly as successful at the box-office as the Billy Jack films,

hands and feet. It makes Finley capable of cutting through all the red tape, bureaucratic or otherwise.

Politicians and America are still the chief stock in-trade villains for Laughlin, though in **MASTER GUNFIGHTER** they are mainly off-stage and talked about by the Spanish Dons before the same embark on massacre sprees.

The massacres are there to satisfy the action market, and there are regular Mai Lai's occurring at the beginning and end of **MASTER GUNFIGHTER**, the massacre-ers (if there is such

a word) being led by Ron O'Neal (of **SUPER FLY** fame or infamy, depending on your frame of reference) who plays a Spanish Don named Paulo. Paulo mentions the Americans, those unseen villains, stealing land and forcing the Dons to such extremism as mass slaughter.

The film opens with a narration that informs us that "All history is part fact, part fiction and mostly interpretation." It also tells us about a legend concerning a Spanish Don who brought a fantastic gun from the East, a gun that fired not six, not seven bullets . . . but **TWELVE**. The better to kill you with, even if he is a peaceful man. This legend also hints that he learned to use the samurai sword with great skill. From watching the actual film, a man could easily be fooled. It's a good thing they told us that in the prologue.

The narration is told over a beautiful image of a rising sun. A caravan appears against the encompassing circle of flame, the sun white hot like a cauldron, and the figures shimmer. The photography for this voice-over is superb; it is, in fact, the best feature of what is otherwise amateur night on celluloid. And while the figures shimmer, and the reds and oranges of the sun fuse with the colors of the ocean over which it rises, the narration continues, switching its topic to the California missions who used Indians as slaves. The priests not only baptized their slave force but also cut off their fingers and resorted to castration when they were really angered.

I am not being flippant here. A serious study of early California could work well in a film. It does not work well in **MASTER GUNFIGHTER**, and it uses very sensitive and complex situations without sensitivity or complexity, or even any revelations. The mention of the castrations are meant to shock the audience. They should. But the film never shows a single mission in the film, none of the people or insitutions they condemn are every portrayed or analyzed. To my memory, the mention of missions and castrations only appear in this one segment, and then the story is off on a standard revenge melodrama, which could have had power had it not been so ineptly written, acted and directed. Jack A. Marta's landscape photography is their only saving grace.

Once the narration is finished we focus on a schooner just off the shoreline and are introduced to a young Indian girl named Chorika (Geo Ann Sosa), who is returning to her village on

the beach at Goleta. The acting is non-existent; one almost wishes the captain or the girl would remain silent (this is a desire that is reinforced throughout the entire film, unfortunately. It might have worked well as a 1920's silent) and they often sound awkward as performers in those cheap sexploitation films that make the rounds at the "art" theaters across the country.

One almost has the wish that one didn't have to be so harsh on the performers. This is probably their first attempt at acting on film, and the script certainly doesn't help them, but it is amazing that someone watching the daily rushes while the movie was being made didn't notice how stiff and flat these scenes were. Not to mention the performers.

Chorika and the Captain are watching what appears to be a bridal procession making its way up the beautiful stretch of beach. Very idyllic. One knows that isn't going to last.

And it doesn't!

When Chorika returns to her village, Hitchcock-type birds chew meat from scattered bones and watch her make her way through the deserted dwellings. As long as there isn't any dialogue, the visual imagery of the film helps keep it alive, and the locales are a definite plus. Chorika finds a dead body, which portends that the other members of her village, who are non-existent at this moment, have met a similar fate.

The scene switches to a Spanish Hacienda where Finley McCloud confronts his brother-in-law Paulo. They are locked in moral combat. Finley is aware that Paulo has butchered the Indians to obtain gold that the Indians, under the guise of the bridal procession, were transporting to the Circle K ranch.

Finley cannot condone Paulo's sadistic mutilation of the Indians, and says he is going to leave his wife, Paulo's sister, and the hacienda; but that Paulo must promise never to enact such an atrocity again. Paulo, proudly, assures Finley that he will never cut down hundreds of human beings, ever again. With that understood, Finley rides off without so much as a "good bye" to his wife who had nothing to do with her brother's reprehensible actions. Eula (Barbara Carrera) is a Santiago, and though Finley loves her, he will give her up to protect the Indians. Exactly why his leaving will stop Paulo from continuing such practices is never fully explained, although Paulo's butchery is somewhat

sanctioned since he is forced by the Americans (who are in control of the Circle K ranch of sinister renown) to have to kill to acquire gold that will enable the Santiago family to retain their Hacienda and their land.

Anyhow, Finley rides out, and it is probably asking too much, considering what transpires in the rest of the plot, to ask for motivation that makes sense for the leading character.

Chorika runs hysterically, or as hysterical as Geo Anne Sosa is able to convey, up the beach while the narrator returns and bridges the next three years of the film in about as many paragraphs. The slaughter, we are told, is never solved, and the dirty underhanded American government agents, concerned about their missing gold, never detect a clue as to what happened to the Indians of Goleta.

Chorika running up the Pacific coastline is replaced with a dimmer setting. Jaurez, Mexico, three years later, and Finley has become part of a travelling sideshow called the Master Gunfighter. Four tough hombres, obviously of gunfighter calibre (obviously because they are unkempt, unshaved, and keep caressing their weapons with their hands) are looking for Finley McCloud, for what purpose we are not told, and are checking out the Master Gunfighter act to see if he might be this self-same Finley.

Finley's act consists of drawing his sword, slicing it down between a girl assistant's widespread legs (there is a fish draped over each knee), and, supposedly, simultaneously, drawing his fantastic twelve shot pistol and shooting a clay plate out of the air. The act is short, and reads better than it comes off in the film.

The four gunfighters, like everybody else who is a minor villain in this film,

approach our hero and insult him, taunt him, and, in general, do their best to appear ugly and irredeemable. Finley takes the abuse with stalwart silence, even when one of the villains draws his sword and slices off the front of Finley's hat. Finley is the man of peace to the end and walks off.

The gunslingers, still not certain the Master Gunfighter is Finley, go to the local saloon where they meet a black card shark named Jacques St. Charles (Lincol Kilpatrick) who is reputed to know Finley and will sell information for a price. Kilpatrick is the most engaging presence MASTER GUNFIGHTER has to offer. He conveys some charm and expertise, and gives St. Charles a roguish flair that succeeds more often than it fails.

Finley, meantime, since his confrontation with the gunslingers, goes to see the local merchants about selling his fantastic weapon.

"Are you giving up being a gunfighter?" one merchant asks, setting Laughlin up for his repartee. "Is being a gunfighter so great?" Laughlin's voice fails to bring the lines off effectively, but it is worse in the confrontation scenes where he must show emotional reactions (something he does not have to do in Billy Jack) and one often feels frightened that his voice is going to crack and squeak in the middle of a fierce argument. Think of all those old silent movie actors facing destitution when the talkies arrived, then move the date upwards of fifty years and Mr. Laughlin's situation would seem comparative. The Master Gunfighter is Mr. Laughlin's first real talkie.

Finley leaves the merchants, and is immediately warned that the gunsling-

(Continued on page 62)

Finley McCloud (Tom Laughlin) uses his Samurai sword to fend off the attacking Santiago vaqueros.



THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER

(Continued from page 40)

ers are waiting to ambush him. Stoically, but without the presence of a Gary Cooper, Finley walks into the ambush. The bad guys display their talent for uttering banal lines like "We're not going to shoot you, Finley. We're going to cut you up a little first, then shoot you, maybe."

If they are out to kill Finley because they have been paid to do so, their animosity doesn't make sense, but it is of little consequence since Finley draws his samurai and dispatches them with quick slashes to their deaths. There are many villains in this film many fights, and nearly all of them are as transparent and rapidly executed as this one. They surely need stuntmen of the Yarima Cavitt or Dave Sharp mold.

A fifth member of the gang Finley recognizes as Manolito, a member of the Santiago hacienda. When Finley asks him who put the price on his head, Manolito tells him it is Paulo.

Paulo?

Finley seems surprised. But why?

Because the dirty American Cattleman's Association is putting the squeeze on the honorable Santiago family again and Paulo is about to butcher another Indian village. Now, granted, the American Cattleman's Association (also known as the sinister Circle-K ranch) may have been up to no-good, heavens know, but how this gives reason for Paulo's mass-slaughter (he is portrayed as a noble Don forced to commit atrocities that he personally hates) is inexcusable bias on the part of Laughlin and his script-writer.

Also, if Finley had remained absent from the Santiago hacienda for three years, living a life of self-denial, why should Paulo, or any of his co-horts even concern themselves with Finley. The gunslingers' presences are flamboyant mechanical plot manipulations to alert Finley to the upcoming disaster.

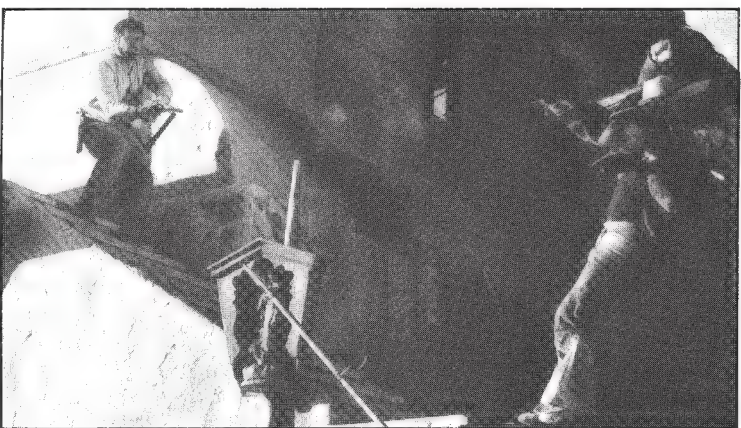
Finley now has a mission, to return to the hacienda and stop the upcoming massacre.

But he takes his time about it . . . nearly two hours worth.

Back with the Santiagos; they hold a council meeting and Paulo states their plight, that the Circle-K and the Cattleman's Association will not let them sell Santiago cattle on the open



From left to right, Lincoln Kilpatrick, Geo Anne Sosa, Tom Laughlin and Hector Elias work over a scene in *THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER* before shooting.



Finley, the Master Gunfighter, eliminated two of his opponents in much more conventional fashion.

market, and American politicians are raising taxes to force the Santiagos to sell their land.

What heels, is the implication, and, again, they certainly may be, but it is Paulo who thinks he has discovered another cache of gold and is willing to mutilate and destroy another Indian village to get his hands on it.

We cut to a shot of Finley, riding along the coastline, obviously heading home for the big showdown with Paulo.

Or, at least, that is Laughlin's intent . . . to give the upcoming confrontation mythic quality. Shane in his determined march to his final encounter with the Rykers: the storm clouds gathering portentously overhead, the thunder rumbling. But the characters in *MASTER GUNFIGHTER* are never infused with the subtle depth and dignity that the characters in *SHANE* have, nor do the characters inter-relate on anything more than the most superficial levels. One Jack

Palance in *SHANE* supasses all the numerous villains in *MASTER GUNFIGHTER*. The saloon fight in *SHANE* might not be Martial Arts, but it is as dramatically stirring as Bruce Lee is in *ENTER THE DRAGON*. The life-and-death battles, though intended for mythic proportions, never attain that stature in the *MASTER GUNFIGHTER*.

Paulo and his right hand man, Maltese, meet. Maltese is the one who sent the gunslingers out to kill Finley. Somehow he is already aware that Finley is making the trek back home, which means someone must be riding a helluva lot faster than Finley, who appears to be taking the scenic route to his eventual violent destiny.

Maltese tells Paulo, in a scene that is as profound as this movie, or the script, is ever going to get, "Finley has a softness in him. A woman's sensitivity. He does not understand that life demands order and discipline, and that sometimes people are expendable

and sometimes must be sacrificed for the greater good of all."

Maltese also tells Paulo that Finley can only travel one route to return (though why that is so is beyond me), and that therefore they can wait in ambush for him. Since they only have word he is on his way I suppose that means they are willing to wait days, or weeks, or, who knows, maybe even months. What else have they got to do with their time besides go on massacre raids and Bushwack missions.

Maltese (Victor Campos) then slinks over to Eula's room. Eula is still the good wife, even if Finley did run out on her three years back, and she is weaving something for Finley to wear when he returns. Now that is an understanding woman. And Eula is obviously Laughlin's version of the Madonna whore. All men immediately lust after her, including Maltese (these villains, as we have stated, are very basic in their desires) who asks Eula in what is supposed to be a vicious manner, "How do you know he's not dead by now?"

But old Eula, she knows.

Hell, maybe she's psychic.

Anyway, she sticks by her man, and is oblivious to the slaving lust of Maltese.

Finley is still taking his own sweet time about getting to the Santiago hacienda and comes across Chorka. She has teamed up with a cute, God-fearing little Mexican named Juan and cheats their customers when she plays poker with them. Finley meets up with her at the moment her newest customers discover they have been cheated and decide take payment out in flesh rather than money.

Time for Finley to step in, and he does, in true Billy Jack fashion.

"I don't want to kill you, Son," he says. "Please. They'll give you back your money." The man referred to as "Son" takes this comment as an insult and challenges Finley, who is still all peace and humbleness. "I'll be the one shamed. I'll ask *your* forgiveness. I'll be the coward and back away."

The cowboy, naturally, will have none of this and Finley uses one of the twelve bullets in his gun to send him to a place where he can consider the error of his ways.

Bad guys don't last long in this movie, and they never, but never, listen to warnings.

While Eula sneaks away from the Hacienda to ride out and warn her husband that an ambush is being set for him, Finley and Chorka discuss

the mystery of the Goletta Indian village. Where did her people disappear?

Jacques St. Charles wants to know the same thing. He has followed Finley, figuring, perceptively, that Finley is somehow connected with the Santiagos . . . and that the Santiagos know something about that disappearance. He figures Finley knows what that connection is, and good naturedly, suggests they blackmail the Santiagos which is what he figures Finley is up to anyhow.

Finley tells St. Charles that he guessed wrong, and leaves the black card shark to discover Chorka being molested by more angry gamblers. This time, the leader starts taking shots at Finley's clothing.

Finley shows his well-famed patience and does nothing until the idiot with the gun tells Finley that the next shot is going to be right between his eyes.

And that is the last thing he ever says.

Finley only has patience to a point, not to a fault.

He could well be the Great-Grandfather of Billy Jack, right down to the way he sighs before he strikes back.

St. Charles, while not the great grandfather of Billy Jack, makes better time than Finley and rides into the ambush. "You people didn't all come out just to welcome me, did you?" he asks with boyish charm and somehow knows immediately that it is Finley they are waiting to kill and offers to sell them information. The ambushers have the bad taste to stage their ambush, by the way, in the deserted Goletta village.

Eula meets up with Finley, and wants to ride away into the sunset with him. She has gold that will finance their way into that sunset, but Finley tells her that gold comes from Goletta and finally we flashback to the day of the massacre so that they can show us all the blood-letting, and how truly atrocious it was, and let Finley and Paulo argue about it again so that Paulo can justify his actions once more.

One wonders why they wait this late in the game to show the actual attack, since it can't come as any surprise to the audience. Everyone already knows there was a slaughter of those people; we've been battered over the head with it for over an hour. In a structural sense the flashback makes no sense; but probably they considered it an arty



effect; it also gives them a chance to show the innocent girl in her bridal dress getting blown away.

After telling Eula in detail about the blood-letting, Finley says, "I just wish that there was some way I could make you understand why I left, why I can't run away with you now, and how much I truly love you." He says this as he prepares to leave once again.

Finley rides right into the trap that Maltese has set for him, and Maltese accuses Finley of betraying the Santiago family for a few worthless Indians. Finley says his mission is peaceful, that he wants to find a way to preserve the Santiago hacienda without anybody being killed, but, as usual, no one listens, and Finley is forced to start killing the men off. He holds up in one of the deserted buildings, shoving his sword through the ceiling up into a would-be attacker.

Maltese decides to use the flaming wagon gambit to smoke that samurai slinging fool out of his refuge. The flaming wagon sets the wood hut on fire and while the vacqueros watch, St. Charles comes out of hiding and challenges Finley to step out and fight him one-to-one, telling Maltese, in an aside, that Finley will come out if it is him against fair odds.

When Finley comes out, St. Charles turns out to be on Finley's side. The Circle-K riders come charging in out of nowhere and begin rousting the vacqueros who forget Finley ever existed and do the first smart thing they have done in this movie.

Flee.

Back at the Hacienda, a messenger lets Paulo know that the gold is on its way, by schooner, from Monterrey. Paulo also has a visitor.

St. Charles.

Maltese frisks St. Charles and finds a derringer, not exactly a weapon of the Martial Arts.

"What do I call this? Little gun? Or Gun Jr.?" he asks, so that St. Charles can come back flippantly with, "A derringer." Actor Kilpatrick is better with the flippant retorts than our star, Mr. Laughlin. With Kilpatrick they actually work.

Shortly thereafter, St. Charles find Finley, who has been wounded during the siege at the Goletta village, mending and under Chorika's care. Finley draws his gun quickly, as if aware that St. Charles is speaking his lines better than the hero.

Finley accuses St. Charles of being a "Government agent," and it sounds nasty. Gee, and only a decade back

Bill Cosby and Robert Culp, in the lighter episodes of the I SPY television series, made the C.I.A. seem to be a refuge for camaraderie and exotic travel. Now it's "Government Agent" and the two words don't even need a tone of voice to give it an aura of disapproval.

Finley does remark that being a government agent is "... a dirty job ... but it beats the hell out picking cotton."

Anyhow, Maltese has had some vacqueros follow St. Charles, and they attack the house that Chorika has been keeping Finley in while she nurses him back to health. Finley has Juan and Chorika hide in the cellar and then starts killing vacqueros in Martial Arts samurai fashion and sometimes simply by putting bullets into their bodies. Whatever seems easiest at the time.

Finley and St. Charles fail to escape, Martial Arts expertise and weaponry not withstanding. The bad guys drop a net on them, and they are all tied up in knots.

Finley is bound and hung from a high tree branch. The reason why they chose this elaborate form of captivity is not exactly clear, but it is a good visual while Paulo and Finley have their first meeting since that fateful goodbye three years in the past.

The film seems like it has been running that long.

"The world is not as you idealists dream," says Paulo, reasonably. "There are butchers everywhere, and you cannot survive unless you have the stomach to butcher them first."

He is going to leave Finley hanging in the breeze until the massacre is over, but Finley can't keep his mouth shut and promises, "Then I'll find you, Paulo, wherever you go, however long it takes me. I'll find you, and I'll kill you!"

It's a good ultimatum, in the classic tradition, although Laughlin lacks the conviction to really make it work. Still, it's closer to its intent than any other portion of the film has been. Unfortunately, any sane man would have kept his mouth shut while in such a ludicrous position of defenselessness. Not Finley, though, and Paulo decides to have weights put on Finley and have him dropped into the sea.

He shoots the bound Finley down, and he is thrown, unceremoniously, into the back of a wagon. But before he can reach his destination so many leagues under the sea, Eula confronts the men Paulo has left in charge of the operation and tells them she will kill

them if they don't let Finley go.

Atta girl, Eula!

Man, no salivatin' cowpokes better salivate in her direction.

Meantime, St. Charles is bound to a huge post that is a part of a wood fire pile. Paulo intends to light the fire at night, burning both wood and St. Charles. The fire will not only roast St. Charles but beckon to the ship carrying the gold, which will think they are to enter the cove at Goletta. The fire will direct them right onto the coral reefs and then, while St. Charles fries to a golden turn, Paulo and his men will raid the ship for its valuable contents. The Indians must be killed just like the Indians at the first Goletta massacre so that no one can fink to the Americans that the vacqueros and the Santiagos have stolen the gold.

The fire pile is on a cliffside promontory, and one must again give credit to some fine cinematography on Mr. Marta's part. The location is well chosen, also, for the big finale.

St. Charles, realizing that Finley is scaling the cliff to reach him, distracts the guard who stand looking out over the ocean.

"Why don't you hurry up and light the fire? You want me to freeze to death?" St. Charles sneers at the guard and the guard kneels him in the groin as an answer. St. Charles isn't worrying about freezing to death

His perennial basset-hound pained expression as much in display as his sword, Finley stands ready to face Paulo in the final duel.



anymore, nor whether or not the guard just executed a clever Martial Arts movement.

The schooner with the gold is spotted!

Finley draws his sword, and he uses it immediately on one of the guards. But, before he can reach St. Charles, the huge stack of wood is set ablaze, flame erupting up into the dark sky.

Finley comes leaping to the rescue, shooting down all the guards nearby. They drop like flies and Finley uses two extra shots (remember he's got twelve all told) to sever St. Charles bonds.

The action in this sequence is fairly effective, at least it has had some type of build-up, and the big finale does have some sense of pacing. The action is not as low key as it has been prior to this, as if everybody has been given transplants and are now revitalized.

Finley goes leaping down the cliffside, stealing a horse at the bottom, after killing God knows how many attackers. He is attempting to reach Paulo and Maltese, whose men are beating the Indians, trying to force them to canoe their way out to the ship.

While Jacque St. Charles cuts the burning logs loose, and they cascade down the cliffside and into the ocean, Finley catches up with Maltese in a seaside shack. Their battle is brief, and Maltese lies dead at Finley's feet.

The schooner, alerted to the fact that this is not the signal it has been looking for, sails off into the distance.

Paulo returns to the Hacienda, dresses in his finest vacquero costume,

and then, at dawn, sets out for the beach to find Finley. The director, and scriptwriter, Harold Lapland, try to infuse the coming clash between Paulo and Finley a feeling that the two men are nobel, gallant figures caught up in the intrigue of nations; but the attempt fails since the proceedings have never attained that stature before that point, and since the script continually simplifies its characters and its situations, not to mention its Martial Arts exhibits.

The location photography is excellent, following Paulo through the golden rod while he seeks Finley and his destiny.

Paulo discovers Finley standing in woods just off the shoreline. He takes his rifle and fires two bullets which slam into trees on either side of Finley's head. He is toying with Finley, much like all of Finley's other attackers who should have shot to kill first and then hurled their arrogant threats.

Paulo fires again, and creases Finley's hand, then he draws his own sword and defiantly throws away the scabbard. The sword fight is better than the others that have occurred frequently in this movie, though it never comes close to the grace and style that even Walt Disney managed to capture with Guy Williams in the Zorro television series. There was a fierce intensity as well as form in those sword-fights, and they moved with startling frenetic pace, arching and twisting, leaping and bounding. The men in MASTER GUNFIGHTER never transcend their caricature stage, never gain flight, though their creators want desperately to give them that comic book mythology. They never succeed, although Finley does succeed in, reluctantly, as usual, killing his opponent.

Finley leaves Paulo's sword as a marker. A worthy opponent, well respected.

The Indians dress in ceremonial costumes and dance. Jacques wants to know why they are dancing? Finley answers, that it is a dance celebrating the fact that the Missions have gone.

On that note, Finley and Eula meet and ride off into the fiery sunset.

Tom Laughlin won't have ridden into the sunset. MASTER GUNFIGHTER failed at the box-office. It tries for the same emotionalism as the Billy Jack films, but it is out of sinc. Impromptu, near improvisation bits of dialogue as are in the school scenes of Billy Jack, cannot be used in a

period piece. The stock villains are not the targets that have taken root in the American conscious, which means the audience cannot transplace the fictional enemy marionettes of the Billy Jack films with real life counterparts in government or law.

Taylor-Laughlin Productions need to learn that they shouldn't expect their audience to follow them like sheep and blindly accept everything they say as truth. The implication that seems to generate from Laughlin these days is that it is heresy to question any aspect of the sermons they have to give.

Some of those statements might be important, but they have weakened their own case with biased and poorly constructed vehicles.

Perhaps, like most of our Presidents since the advent of television, movie stars selling sincerity cannot withstand media scrutiny that digs out the skeletons.

There certainly seem to be some clanging out, wherever one looks.

It leaves the motivations behind Taylor-Laughlin Productions somewhat suspect and certainly not as one-dimensional as the motivations they give their characters.

As for the Martial Arts, and the philosophy of those arts, one would be better off catching a rerun of Sidney Pollack's THE YAKUZA. The swordplay and the philosophy receive the kind of treatment they deserve.

They don't get it in THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER.



Tom Laughlin as Finley McCloud, the Master Gunfighter.

SONS OF THE TIGER

TIGER, TIGER... BURNING BRIGHT

WHAT IS A
MAN, TIGER?

A STRONG THING OR
A FRAGILE THING?

AN AGGREGATE
OF BLOOD AND BONE,
FLESH AND BRAIN?
A COLLECTION OF
PARTICULARS INTO
THE MASS OF A
WHOLE? A DISTINCT
THING? A UNIQUE
THING?

AN ENEMY?

OR A FRIEND?

YOU CAN'T
JUST **BARGE** IN
HERE AND DEMAND
EMERGENCY SERVICE!
THERE ARE **FORMS**
TO BE FILLED OUT!
PROCEDURES--

THEN YOU FILL 'EM
OUT' DOC! AN' IF YOU
GOT ANYTHIN' ELSE
TO **BEEF** ABOUT--

--TRY PLACIN' A
FAST CALL TO THE
COMMISSIONER
O' POLICE!

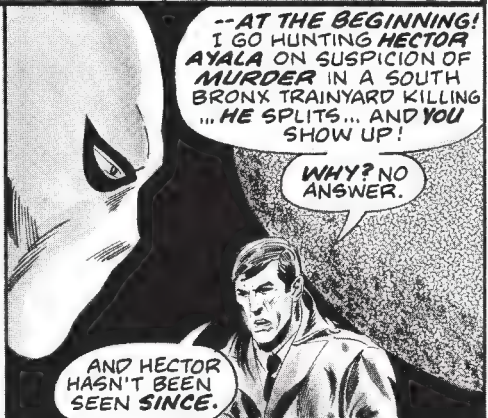
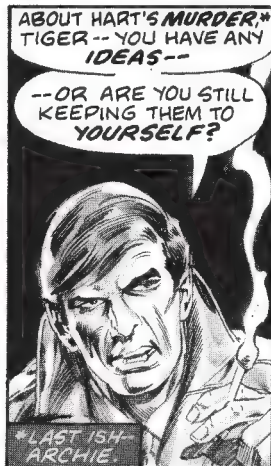
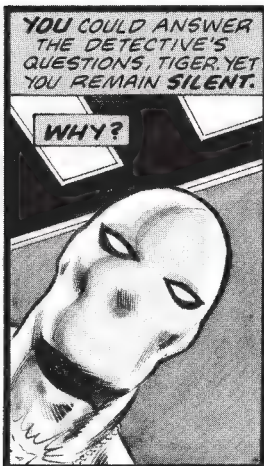
STICK **CLOSE**
TO ME, TIGER! I'M
STILL NOT **SURE** WHERE
YOU FIT IN TO ALL THIS--

--BUT I DON'T WANT
TO LOSE **SIGHT** OF
YOU UNTIL IT'S ALL
FIGURED OUT!

THE MAN ON THE **STRETCHER**
CALLED HIMSELF **JACK OF HEARTS**.
THESE OTHERS ARE **NATHANIEL BYRD--**
BLACKBYRD, A DETECTIVE, AND DET.
SGT. **JAMES D'ANGELO**. ENEMIES?

THE OTHER IS YOUR
SISTER, **AWILDA AYALA**.
SHE KNOWS YOU... YET
KNOWS YOU NOT AT ALL.
FRIEND?

AND YOU, TIGER? WHO--
OR WHAT-- ARE YOU?



WHICH LEADS US TO POINT NUMBER TWO. A FEW MONTHS AGO I HELPED BREAK UP A FAMILY FEUD DOWN IN CHINA-TOWN! A MOVIE-ARTIST GONE MARTIAL ARTIST GAVE ME A HAND! HIS NAME WAS BOB DIAMOND!*

AN' THE OTHER TWO BELONG TO HIS BUDDIES. DUDES BY THE NAME O' ABE BROWN AN' LIN SUN!

ASK HIM!

WHY DON'T YOU ASK HIM??

IT'S COMING. YOU CAN SENSE IT.

AS SOLID AS A LIFETIME AND AS SHARP AS A KNIFE! FACE IT, TIGER... 'CAUSE THERE AIN'T NO WAY TO AVOID IT!

WHERE IS HE, PIG?

WHERE'S HECTOR?

ALL THIS STARTED WHEN HE **DISAPPEARED!** WHEN YOU FIRST **SHOWED UP!**

IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU THAT HE'S GONE! I KNOW IT!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY BROTHER? WHAT??

WHY DON'T YOU--

SHE TURNS FROM YOU, YOUR SISTER.

I-- I'M SORRY, BLACK-BYRD!

S'ALL RIGHT, LITTLE LADY.

DOES THAT MAKE HER AN ENEMY?

CALLED THEMSELVES THE **SONS O' TIGER** BEFORE THEY SPLIT UP!

WHO DO YOU WANT TO ANSWER **FIRST, BRO?**

THAT'S HIS **TIGER CLAW** YOU'RE WEARIN' AROUND YOUR NECK!

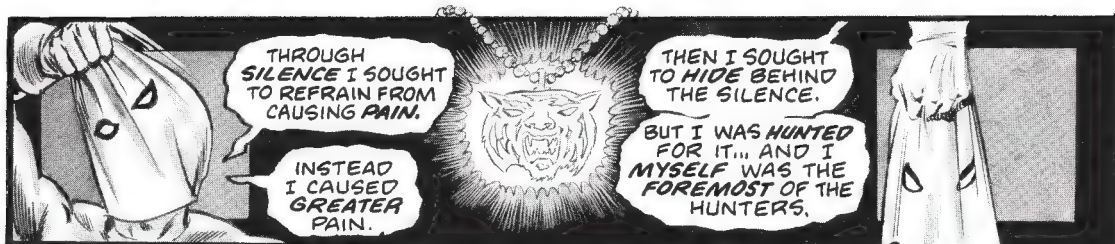
BUT I DON'T RECALL 'EM HANDIN' AWAY THEIR **NECK-LACES!**

ANSWER ME, DAMN YOU!

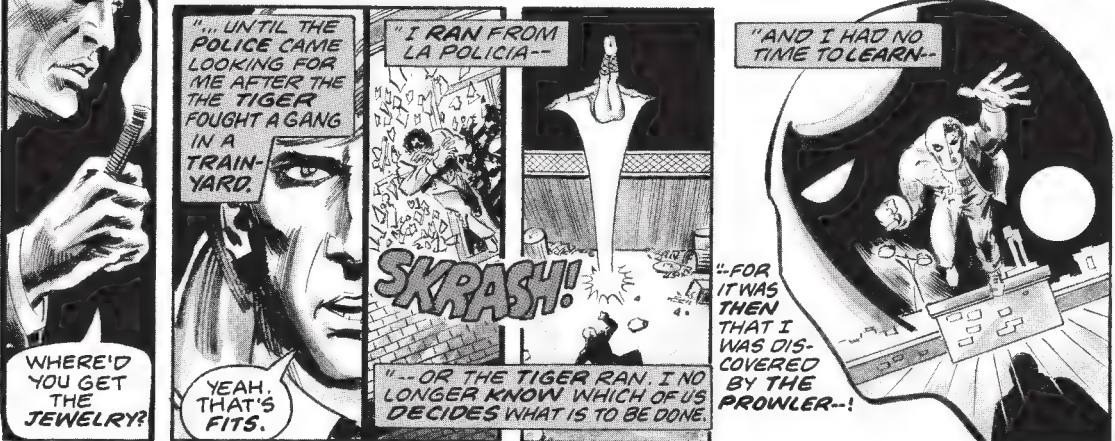
--ANSWER ME...

'WILDA...?

* DHKF#13
--ARCHIE



"I FOUND THEM, BLACKBYRD... IN AN ALLEY BEHIND AN ABANDONED BUILDING IN THE EAST VILLAGE. I... CHANGED AS SOON AS I PICKED THEM UP. CHANGED INTO THE WHITE TIGER! BUT I COULDN'T REMEMBER THE CHANGING WHEN I WOKE AGAIN AS HECTOR..."





"THE TIGER BATTLED. THAT'S HIS-- MY REACTION TO EVERYTHING!"

FIGHT FIRST-- ASK QUESTIONS LATER!



"AN' THE FIGHTS JUST DIDN'T STOP, MAN! LIKE, EVERYTIME I TURNED AROUND! LA POLICIA! THE PROWLER--"



"-- AN' THEN JACK OF HEARTS!"

'WILDA... IT WAS A CRAZY SCENE! WHEN THE TIGER TAKES OVER-- I JUST AIN'T ME ANYMORE!

I'M HIM, 'WILDA!

AN' IT SEEMED LIKE HE ATTRACTED! TROUBLE! THE PROWLER, 'CAUSE OF THAT KID WHO GOT KILLED--

-- AN' JACK, FOR SOME REASON EVEN I AIN'T FIGURED OUT YET!*

I TRIED TO STOP IT, 'WILDA--

-- BUT THERE JUST AIN'T NO WAY!



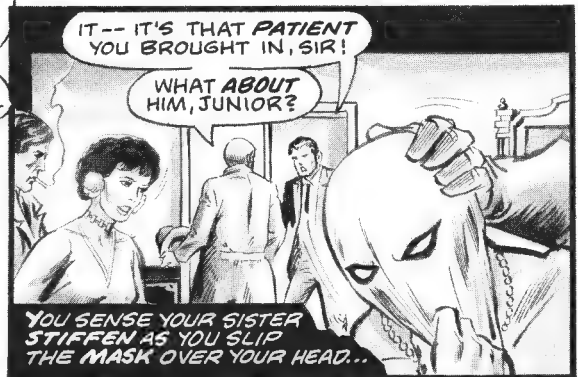
* ISSUES 19-23-- ARCH.



I-- I'M SORRY! I KNOW WE WERE TOLD NOT TO INTERRUPT!

BUT SOMETHING'S HAPPENED!

THIS BETTER BE GOOD, BRO'!



IT-- IT'S THAT PATIENT YOU BROUGHT IN, SIR!

WHAT ABOUT HIM, JUNIOR?

YOU SENSE YOUR SISTER STIFFEN AS YOU SLIP THE MASK OVER YOUR HEAD...



... BUT THERE IS NO TIME TO THINK OF THAT JUST NOW.

HE-- HE TRIED TO GET HIS BODY-ARMOR OFF-- TO TREAT HIS BROKEN RIBS--

-- AND HE, WELL--

-- HE JUST STARTED EXPLODING!

IN FACT, IT WENT SOMETHING LIKE...

SKRAA--

SKRR--

JACK.

BUT IF IT IS
REMOVED WHILE HE
LIES SEDATED

--THERE IS
NO WAY TO
STOP IT!!

NOW AIN'T
THAT JUST
PEACHES? ALL
RIGHT, TIGER--
GO GET HIM--

-- BUT THIS
BETTER NOT BE--

BUT IF IT IS
REMOVED WHILE HE
LIES SEDATED

--THERE IS
NO WAY TO
STOP IT!!

NOW AIN'T
THAT JUST
PEACHES? ALL
RIGHT, TIGER--
GO GET HIM--

-- BUT THIS
BETTER NOT BE--

BUT IF IT IS
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THAT JUST
PEACHES? ALL
RIGHT, TIGER--
GO GET HIM--

-- BUT THIS
BETTER NOT BE--

BUT IF IT IS
REMOVED WHILE HE
LIES SEDATED

--THERE IS
NO WAY TO
STOP IT!!

NOW AIN'T
THAT JUST
PEACHES? ALL
RIGHT, TIGER--
GO GET HIM--

-- BUT THIS
BETTER NOT BE--

THERE! THE BURSTS COME FROM THAT ROOM!

HEY BRO! YOU WANT TO GET KILLED?

THERE! THE BURSTS COME FROM THAT ROOM!

HEY BRO! YOU WANT TO GET KILLED?

A black and white comic book panel. A character, likely a superhero, is shown in a dynamic, mid-air pose. He is wearing a suit with a mask and has a determined expression. He is holding a long, thin object, possibly a sword or a staff, which is glowing with energy. The character is surrounded by a large, stylized splash or explosion effect. In the background, there is a window with a grid pattern. Two speech bubbles are present: one at the top left saying "NO." and one at the top right saying "NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!". The panel is framed by a thick black border.

A black and white comic book panel. A character, likely a superhero, is shown in a dynamic, mid-air pose. He is wearing a suit with a mask and has a determined expression. He is holding a long, thin object, possibly a sword or a staff, which is glowing with energy. The character is surrounded by a large, stylized splash or explosion effect. In the background, there is a window with a grid pattern. Two speech bubbles are present: one at the top left saying "NO." and one at the top right saying "NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!". The panel is framed by a thick black border.

DID YOU HEAR HIM, BLACKBYRD? EVEN HIS VOICE IS DIFFERENT!

YEAH, JIMINY--AN' HE MOVES REAL GOOD! LIKE ANOTHER DUDE I USED TA KNOW.

CAT BY THE NAME OF BROWN--

DID YOU HEAR HIM, BLACKBYRD? EVEN HIS VOICE IS DIFFERENT!

YEAH, JIMINY--AN' HE MOVES REAL GOOD! LIKE ANOTHER DUDE I USED TA KNOW.

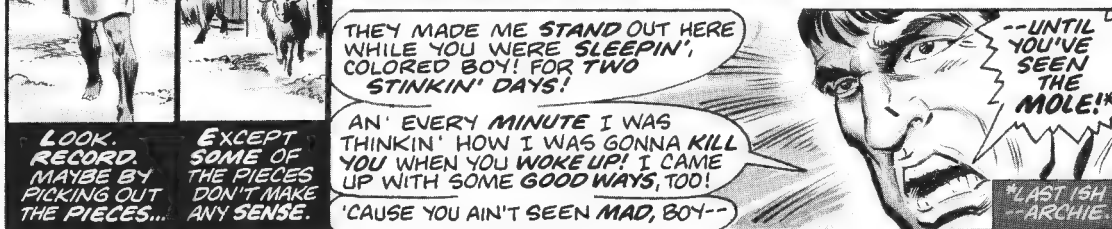
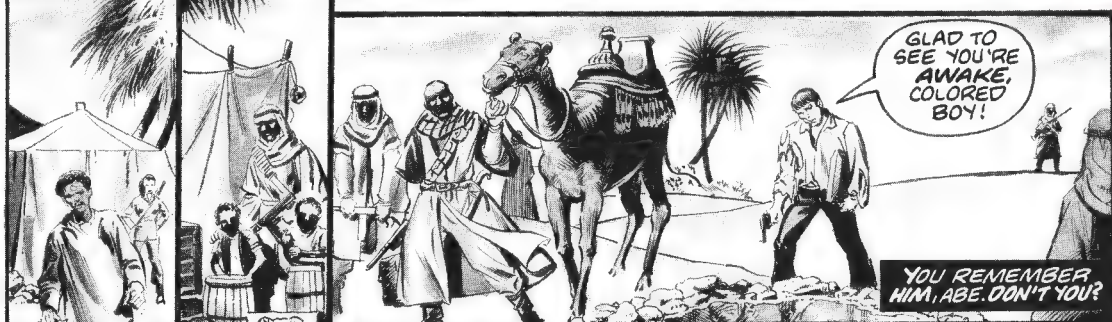
CAT BY THE NAME OF BROWN--

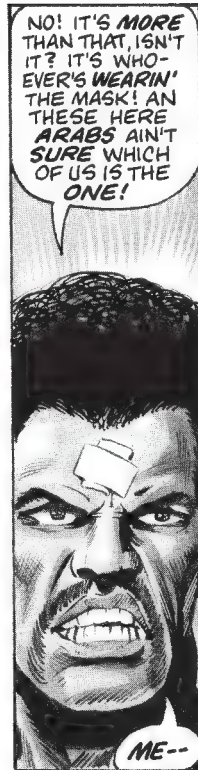
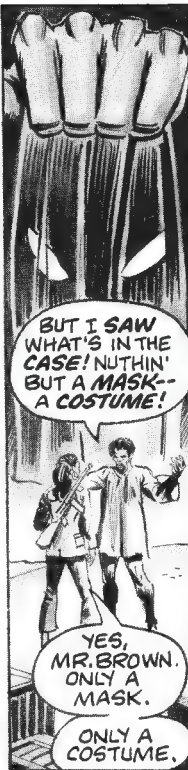
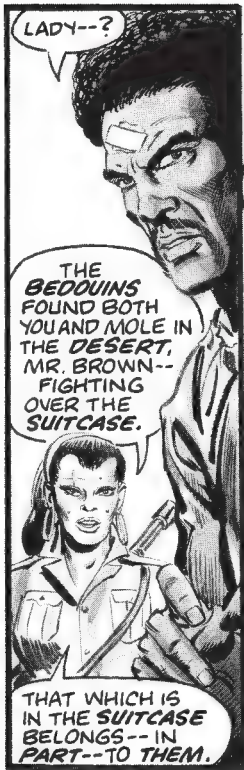
DID YOU HEAR HIM, BLACKBYRD? EVEN HIS VOICE IS DIFFERENT!

YEAH, JIMINY--AN' HE MOVES REAL GOOD! LIKE ANOTHER DUDE I USED TA KNOW.

CAT BY THE NAME OF BROWN--











SURE! SURE!
ANYTHING YOU
SAY! I WAS
JUST KIDDIN'!

HONEST!!

THE
MESSAGE!

JUST A
SECOND,
IS ALL!



SURE! SURE!
GO AHEAD!

JUST TAKE
A SECOND TO
GET THE
TELETYPE
MACHINE
GOIN'!



BOB DIAMOND
--STOP-- ABE'S
PLANE DOWN IN
SAHARA--

--STOP-- BODY MISSING--

--CAN
YOU
HELP?
STOP--

--REMEMBER--

--WHEN
THREE ARE
CALLED--

--AND STAND AS ONE!



S' THAT
IT?

YES.
THAT'S
IT.

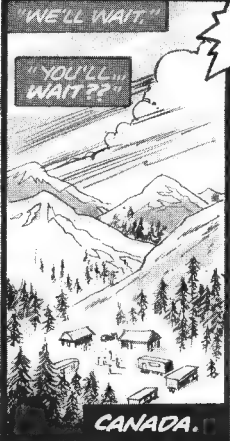
I'LL GET IT
RIGHT OUT,
MISTER--AN'
DON'T FRET
THE CHARGE
NONE!



IT'S ON THE
HOUSE!

HOW
LONG
WILL IT
TAKE?

COUPLE'A
HOURS,
MAYBE!



"WE'LL WAIT."

"YOU'LL
WAIT??"

CANADA.



EVERY
BODY!

BREAK OUT
SHOVELS!



WE'RE GONNA NEED
MORE THAN JUST
SHOVELS, MR. TRANE!

THAT'S
ALL WE'VE
GOT,
MAN!

LORD HELP
US-- THAT'S ALL
WE'VE GOT!



MR. TRANE!
TELEGRAM
JUST CAME
IN!

FOR
MR. DIAMOND!



SHOULD I SEND
A REPLY, SIR?

A
REPLY?

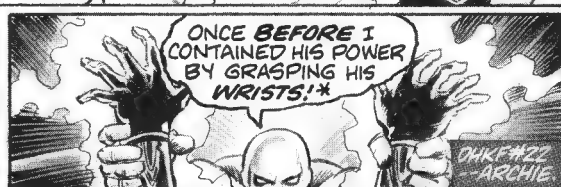


YEAH! TELL THEM
BOB DIAMOND'S...
INDISPOSED
RIGHT NOW--

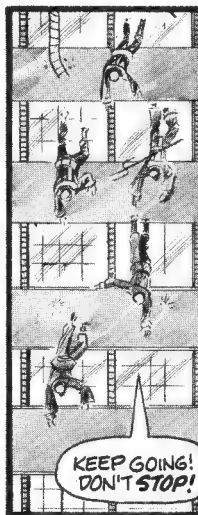
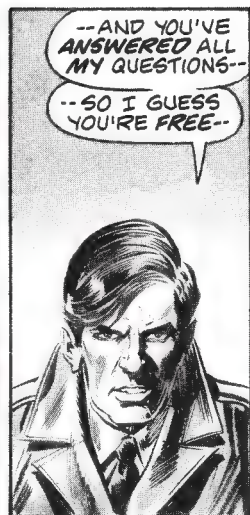
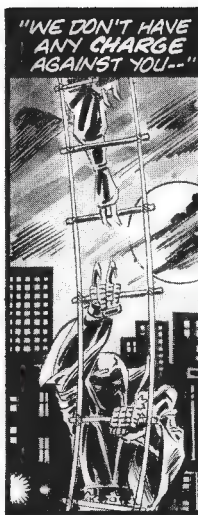
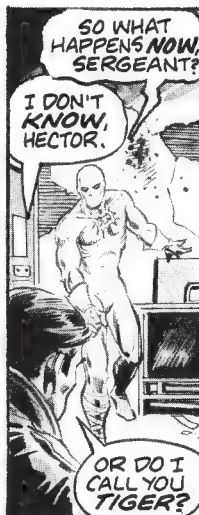
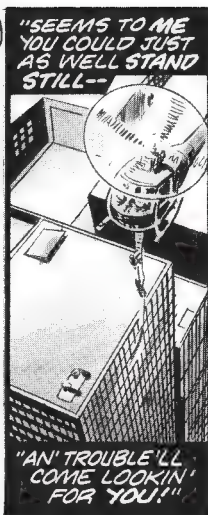
--UNDER A
MOUNTAIN
OF SNOW!!

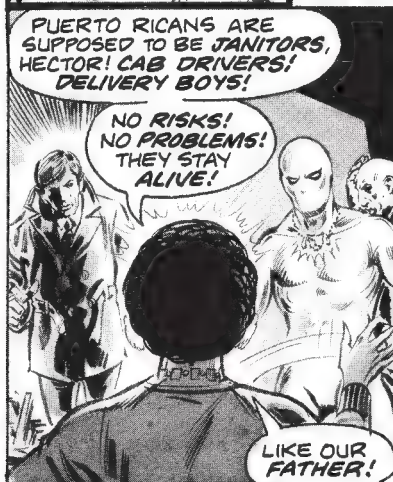
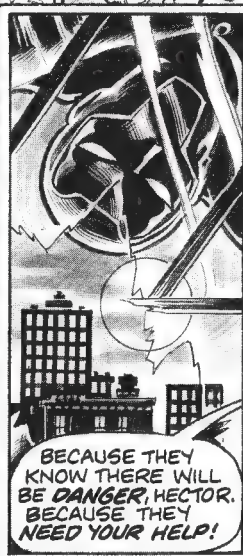
LORD! NOBODY
COULD'VE LIVED
THROUGH THIS!

MEANWHILE...

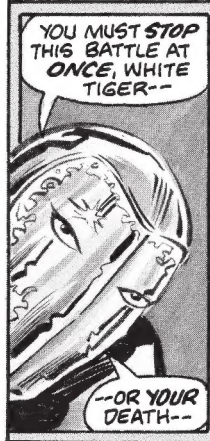
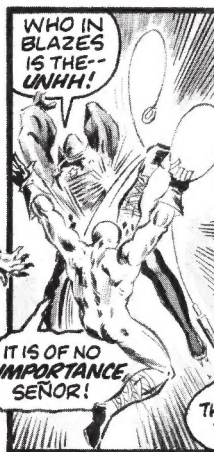


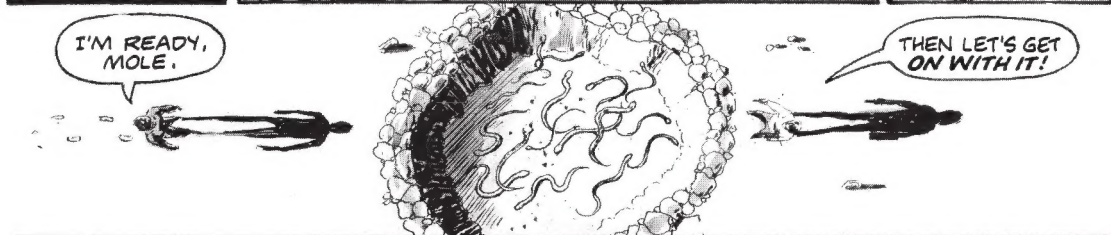












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